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MATTIE: A STRAY.

BOOK I.

FIGURES IN OUTLINE.

CHAPTER I.

LIFE IN GREAT SUFFOLK STREET.

It was not an evening party of the first water, or given by people of first-rate position in society, or held in a quarter whither the fashionable classes most do congregate. It was a small party—ostensibly a juvenile party—held on the first-floor of a stationer's shop in Great Suffolk Street, Southwark.

Not even a first-rate stationer's, had the shutters been down and the fog less dense to allow us to inspect Mr. Wesden's wares; but an emporium, which did business in no end of things—cigars, tobacco-pipes, children's toys, glass beads by the skein or ounce, fancy work, cottons, and tapes. These, the off-shoots from the stationery business, the news-vending, the circulating of novels in four, five, and six volumes at one penny per volume, if not detained more than three days; a stationery business which report said had not turned out badly for old Wesden, thanks to old Wesden's patience, industry, and care, say we—thanks to his screwing and his close-fistedness, that would not have trusted his own mother, had she lived, said the good people—for there are good people every where—in Great Suffolk Street. Certainly there were but small signs of "close-fistedness" about the premises on that particular evening; the shop had been closed at an earlier hour than business-men would have considered suitable. They were wasting the gas in Mr. Wesden's drawing-room; feasting and revelry held dominion there. There had been three separate knocks given at the door from three separate Ganymedes—No. 1, with oranges; No. 2, with tarts from the pastry-cook; No. 3, with beer; which last was left in a tin can of colossal proportions, supper not being ready, and beer being liable to flatness in jugs—especially the beer from the Crown.

We watch all this from the outside, in the thick fog which made things unpleasant in Great Suffolk Street. There is more life, and life that appertains to this chapter of our history, outside here than in that first-floor front, where the sons and daughters of Mr. Wesden's neighbors are playing at forfeits, romping, jumping, and laughing, and thoroughly enjoying themselves. They are not thinking of the fog, the up-stairs folk, shut away from the rawness of that January night. It would have troubled Mr. Wesden had his shop been open, and led him to maintain a stricter watch over the goods, and upon those customers whose faces might be strange to him;

but he had forgotten the weather at that juncture, and sat in the corner of the drawing-room, smoking his pipe, and keeping his daughter—a bright-faced, golden-haired girl of twelve—within his range of vision. The fog and the cold troubled no one at Mr. Wesden's: only "outsiders" objected, and remarked upon them to friends when they met, coughing over one, and shivering through the other, as lungs and scanty clothes necessitated. The establishment of Mr. Wesden, stationer, troubled or attracted, an outsider though, who had passed and repassed it three or four times between the hours of eight and nine P.M., and at half past nine had backed into the recess of Mr. Wesden's doorway. A small outsider, of uncertain age—a boy, a non-descript, an any thing, judging by the pinched white face and unkempt hair; a girl, by the rag of a frock that hung upon her, and from which her legs and feet protruded.

Subject-matter of great interest was there for this small watcher—huddled in the doorway, clutching her elbows with her bony fingers, and listening at the keyhole, or varying proceedings now and then by stepping on to the clammy pavement, and looking up through the fog at the lighted blinds, once or twice indulging in a flat-footed kind of jig to keep her feet warm. She was one of few loiterers in Great Suffolk Street that uncomfortable night—men, women, and boys hurried rapidly past, and thinned in number as the night stole on: only a policeman slouched by occasionally, and dismayed her somewhat, judging by her closer proximity to Mr. Wesden's street-door, whenever his heavy tread jarred upon her nerves.

When the majority of the shops were closed, when the fog grew denser as the lights went out, and the few stragglers became more phantom-like and gray, quite a regiment of policemen marched down Great Suffolk Street, changing places at certain corners with those officials who had done day-duty, and glad to have done, for that day at least.

The new policeman who crawled upon Mr. Wesden's side of the way was a sharper man than he who had left off crawling, and gone home at a gallop to his wife and thirteen children; for the new-comer was not deceived by the deep doorway and the dense fog, but reached forth a hand and touched the figure cowering in the shadows.

A red-faced young man, with a bull neck, was this Suffolk Street official—an abrupt young man, who shook people rather violently by the shoulder, and hurt them.

"Oh!—stash that, please," ejaculated the child, at last; "you hurts!"

"What do you want here?"

"Nothin' partickler. If the young gal inside knows I'm here she'll send out somethin' prime. That's all. Last thing, afore she goes to bed, she comes and looks, mostly. She's a good 'un."

"Ah! you'd better go home."

"Can't manage to make it up tuppence—and square the last penny with Mother Watts. You know Mother Watts?"

"Ah!"

"Well, she's down upon me, Watts is; so I can't go home."

"You must go somewhere; you can't stop here."

"Lor bless you, this is the comfortabest doorway in the street, if you don't mind, p'leesman. I often turn in here for the night, and some of you fine fellers lets a gal bide, and ain't so down upon her as you are. You're new to this beat."

"Am I, really?" was the ironical rejoinder.

"You used to do Kent Street and stir up Mother Watts. You locked up Mother Watts once—don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. Are you going?"

"If you won't let a gal stay, o' course I am. They've got a jolly kick-up here—that gal with the blue frock's birthday—old Wesden's gal, as I just told you about—I wish I was her! Did you ever see her of a Sunday?"

"Not that I know on."

"Just like the little gals at the play—spruce as carrots—and gloves on, and such boots! Fust-rate, I can tell you."

"I wouldn't jaw any more, but go home," suggested the policeman.

"All right, master. I say, don't you twig how the fog has got on my chest?"

"Well, you *are* hoarse-ish."

"Spilt my voice yesterday, and made it wus by tryin' it on in Union Street to-day. Gave it up, and bought a haporth of lucifers, and got the boxes in my pocket now. Hard lines to-night, mate."

Familiarity breeds contempt and engenders ro-buke. The loquacity of the child offended the official, who drew her from the doorway with a jerk, totally unexpected upon her side, and placed her in the roadway.

"Now be off from here; I've had enough of you."

"Werry well; why didn't you say so afore?"

And, without waiting for a reply to her query, the child went down Great Suffolk Street toward the Borough, sullenly and slowly. The policeman watched her vanish in the fog, and resumed his way; he had done his duty to society, and "moved on" one who had insulted it by her helplessness and squalor; there was a woman shrieking denunciations on the pot-man of the public house at the corner—a man who had turned her uncereemoniously into the street—let him proceed to business in a new direction.

Twenty steps on his way, and the ill-clad, sharp-visaged girl, stealing back in the fog to the welcome doorway whence he had abruptly expelled her.

"He's not every body," she ejaculated, scrtw-ing herself comfortably into her old quarters, "though he thinks he is. I wonder what they're up to now? Don't I wish it was my buff-day,

and somebody had somethink to give me, that's all. Don't I—oh, gemini!"

"Hillo!—I beg pardon—I didn't know any one was hiding here—have I hurt you?" inquired a youth, who, running down Great Suffolk Street at a smart pace, had turned into this doorway, and nearly jammed its occupant to death with the sudden concussion.

"You've done for my lights, young 'un," was the grave assertion.

"Your—your what?"

"My Congreve lights—there's a kiver gone—I heered it scrunch. 'Spose you'll pay like a—like a man?"

"I—I'm very sorry, but really I'm rather scarce of pocket-money just now—in fact, I've spent it all," stammered the lad. "You see, it was your fault, hiding here, and playing about here at this time of night, and I was in a hurry, being late."

"There isn't any one inside who'd stand a ha-penny, is there?" whined the girl; "I'm the gal that's allus about here, you know—I've had nuffin' to eat to-day, and ain't no money for a night's lodging. I'm hard up—wery hard up, upon my soul. I don't remember being so druv since mother died o' the fever—never. And I'm not well—got a sore throat, which the fog touches up—awful."

"I'll—I'll ask my pa'; but I don't think there is any thing to give away."

The youth knocked at the door, and presently rushed by the servant who opened it, paying no heed to the remark of,

"Well, you are late, Master Sidney, I must say!"

The door closed again, and Master Sidney—a tall lad of fourteen, with long brown hair, brown eyes, and a white face—tore up the stairs two steps at a time, and dashed with but little ceremony into the dining-room, where the supper was laid by that time, and the juveniles were ranged round the table, large-eyed and hungry.

A shout from the boys assembled there—"Here's Sidney Hinchford;" a reproof from a stiff-backed, white-haired old gentleman in the corner—"Where *have* you been, boy?" a light-haired fairy in white muslin and blue sash darting toward him, crying, "Sidney, Sidney, I thought you were lost!"

"So I have been—lost in the fog—such a mull of it! I'll tell you presently when I've spoken to pa' for a moment. And, oh! Harriet, here's—here's a little brooch I've bought, and with many happy, happy returns of the day from a tiresome play-fellow, and—and—*stolen, by Jingo!*"

The hand withdrew itself from the side-pocket of his jacket, and was passed over the forehead, the lower jaw dropped, the brown eyes glared round the room, across at the opposite wall, and up at the gas branch—a two-burner, of a bronze finger-post pattern—and then Master Sidney doubled up suddenly and collapsed.

CHAPTER II.

MATTIE.

MRS. SARAH JANE WATTS, better known to society and society's guardians by the cognomen of Mother Watts, kept a lodging-house in Kent

Street. They who know where Kent Street, Borough, is, and what Kent Street is like by night and day, can readily imagine that the establishment of Mrs. Watts was not a large one, or the prices likely to be high. Mrs. Watts's house, in fact, belonged not to Kent Street proper, but formed No. 2 of a cut-throat-looking court, crossing Kent Street at right angles. Here beds, or shares of beds, or shelves arranged horizontally under beds, were let out at two-pence per head, or three half-pence without the blankets, which were marked "Stop Thief!"

Whether Mrs. Watts did badly with her business, or whether business prospered with her, it was difficult to determine by the landlady's external appearance, Mrs. W. being ever in rags, ever full of complaints and—drink. "Times" were always hard with her—the police were hard with her—her Kent Street contemporaries were hard with her—didn't treat her fair, undersold her, put more in a bed and charged less—"split upon her when things weren't on the square. Kent Street wasn't what it was when she was a gal!"

People constantly breathing the same atmosphere may notice a change in the "surroundings;" but to common observers, or prying people paying occasional visits to this place, Kent Street seems ever the same—an eyesore to public gaze, a satire on parish cleanliness and care, a disgrace to parish authorities in general, and landlords and ground landlords in particular.

Ever to common eyes the same appearances in Kent Street. The bustle of a cheap trade in its shops; the knots of thieves and loose-livers at every narrow turning; the murmurs of unseen dispirited, in the true London vernacular, welling from dark entries and up-stairs rooms; the shoals of children, hatless, shoeless, almost garmentless—all a medley of sights and sounds, increasing toward nightfall, when Kent Street is full of horror, and lives and purses are not safe there.

It is eleven in the evening of the same day in which our story opens, and Mrs. Sarah Jane Watts, baggy as regards costume and unsteady as regards her legs, was standing in the doorway of her domicile, inspecting, by the light of the candle in her hand, a trinket of some kind which had been proffered her by a smaller mortal infinitely more ragged than herself.

"You got it honestly—I takes your word for it—you allers was a gal who spoke the truth, I will say that for you—it's a sham affair, and brassy as a knocker—say eight-pence?"

"It's really gold, Mrs. Watts: it's worth a heap of money."

"It's the brassiest thing that ever I clapped eyes on: say eight-pence and a bit of supper?"

"What sort o' supper?"

"Hot 'supper—tripe and inguns—as much as you can pad with."

"It's worth a sight more, if it's gold."

"I'll ask Simes—go up stairs and wait a min-it"—Simes 'll tell us if it's gold, and p'raps stand more for it. I don't want the thing—I don't think it's safe to keep, myself; and if you've priggid it, Mattie, why, you'd better let it go."

"Very well."

Mattie—the girl whom we have watched in the dark entry of Mr. Weeden's door, wearied out with Mrs. Watts's loquacity, or overpowered

by her arguments, went up stairs into a room on the first-floor. A long, low-ceilinged room, containing three beds, and each bed containing four women and a few supplementary children, one affected with a whooping-cough that was evidently fast racking it to death. This was the feminine dormitory of Mrs. Watts—a place well known to London women in search of a night's rest, Southwark way—a place for the ballad singer who had two-pence to spend, or a soul above the work-house; for the beggar-women who had whined about the streets all day; for the tramps passing from Surrey to Essex, and taking London *en route*; for women of all callings, who were deplorably poor, idle, or vicious—it mattered not, so that they paid Mrs. Watts her claim upon them.

Mattie sat down by the fire, and began shivering with more violence than had characterized her in the cold and fog. The disturbed shadow, flung by the fire-light—the only light there—on the wall, shivered and danced grotesquely in the rear. No one took notice of the new-comer, although more than one woman lay awake in the back-ground. A wrinkled hag, reposing with her basket of stay-laces under her head for security's sake, winked and blinked at her for a while, and then went off into a disjunct snore; the young mother with the sick child sat up in her share of the bed, and rocked the coughing infant backward and forward, till her neighbor, with an oath, swore at her for letting the cold in: then all was as Mattie had found it upon entering.

Presently Mrs. Watts returned, candle in hand, smelling more aromatically of something hot and strong than ever.

"Simes says it's brass, and worth eight-pence, and here's the money. Strike me dead if he said more than eight-pence: there!—strike him blind if he'll get a farden out of it!"

"Where's the money?"

"Here's fippence—tuppence for to-night, and a penny you owe me, that makes eight-pence; and as for supper, why, I'll keep my word—no one can ever say of Mother Watts that she didn't keep her word in any think she undertooked."

"I—I don't care so much about supper as I did—ain't I just husky? No singing to-morrow, mother."

"Only singing small," was the rejoinder, with a grunt at her own wit; "you'd do better picking up brooches—you was allers clever with your fingers, mind you. I only wish I'd been 'arf as sharp when I was young."

"I—I only wish I hadn't—found the thing," commented the girl, sorrowfully.

"Well, I'm blest!"

Mrs. Watts was taking off the lid of her saucepan, and probing the contents with a fork.

"Fippence isn't a fortun, and the young chap gave me a hapenny once when I was singing in Suffolk Street—I didn't mean it, somehow—I said I never would again! Don't you remember when mother died here, how she went on just at the last as to what was to become o' me; and didn't I say I'd grow up good, and stick to singing and begging, and all that *fun*—or go to the workus—or any think?"

"Ah! your mother was a fine 'un to go on sometimes."

"And then I—"

"Now, I don't want to hear any think about your goings on—I don't know where you found that brassy brooch—I don't want to know—Simes don't want to know! We takes your word for it that it was come by proper, and the less you say about it the better; and the sooner you turns into bed, if you don't want no supper, the better too."

"I don't see a good twopen'orth over there," commented Mattie; "they're as full as ever they can stick."

"Take the rug, gal, and have it all to yourself, here by the fire."

"Well, it's not so bad. I say, you know old Wesden?"

"What, in Suffolk Street? Well."

"He's got a party to-night; I have been a listening to the music; they've been dancing and all manner. And laughing—my eye! they just have been a laughing, Mother Watts—I've been laughing myself to hear 'em."

"Um!" was the unsympathetic response.

"It's a buff-day—Wesden's gal's buff-day. You know Wesden's gal—proud of herself rather, and holds her head up in furst-rate style, as well she may with such a shop as her father's got in Suffolk Street, and good and pretty as she is, Lor bless her! I s'pose old Wesden's worth pounds and pounds now?"

"Hundreds."

"Hundreds and hundreds of pounds," commented Mattie, coiling herself in the rug upon the floor; "ah! I s'pose so. I often thinks, do you know, I should like to be Wesden's little gal. What a lucky thing it 'd be to be turned somehow into Wesden's little gal, just at Christmas-time, when fairies are about!"

"What!"

"Real fairies, on course—not the gals with the legs in the pantermies. If there was any real fairies on course too, but I'm too knowing to b'lieve that. But if there was, I'd say, please turn me into Wesden's little gal, and give me the big' doll by the parlor door, and dress me like a lady in a blue meriner."

"Well, you are going on nicely about Wesden's gal. That was allus your fault, Mattie; such a gal to jaw, jaw, jaw—such a clapper, clapper, clapper about every think and every body."

"I was just a thinking that I *was* going it rather; but I ain't a bit sleepy, and I thought you wouldn't mind me while you was having your supper, and my throat's so awful sore, and you ain't so sharp quite as you are sometimes. Do you know what I'd do if I was a boy?"

"How should I know?"

"Go to sea—get away from here, and grow up 'spectable. I wouldn't stop in Kent Street—I hate Kent Street; I'd walk into the country—oh! ever so far—until I came to the sea, and then I'd find a ship and turn sailor."

"Lookee here, you young drab," cried the stay-lace woman, suddenly opening her eyes, and shrieking out in a shrill falsetto, "I'll turn out and skin you if you can't keep that tongue still. What am I here for?—what did I pay tuppence for?—isn't that cussed coughing baby enough row at a time?"

"If you've got any think to say aginst my baby," said a husky voice in the next bed, "say it out to his mother, and mind your cat's head while you say it, you disagreeable baggage!"

"Well, the likes of that!"

"And the likes of you, for that matter! Don't give me any more of your sarse, or I'll—"

A tapping on the door with a stick diverted the general attention.

"Who's there?"

"Only me, Mrs. Watts."

"Oh! *only* you," was the response; "come in, will yer? I've no need to lock myself in while I hide the swag away. *Now*, what's the matter?"

The door was opened, and enter a policeman, a man in private clothes, with a billycock hat and a walking-stick, accompanied by a pale-faced, long-haired youth of fourteen years of age.

"Nothing particular the matter—only something lost as usual, Mrs. Watts," said the man in private dress, politely. "Where's Mattie to-night?"

"There she is. She's been in all the evening with a bad throat."

"Poor girl! throats 's bad at this time of the year."

The speaker looked at the lad at his side, after giving the first turn backward to the rug.

"Is this the girl?"

The policeman took the candle from the table, and held the light close to the girl's face—white, pinched, and haggard, with black eyes full of horror.

"Don't say it's me, please," she gasped, in a low voice; "I'm the gal that sings in Suffolk Street on a Saturday night, and they gives wittles to at Wesden's. It isn't me."

Mattie had intended to brave it out at first, to have remained stolid, sullen, and defiant, after the manners of her class; but she felt ill and nervous, and the shadow of the prison-house loomed before her and made her heart sink. Prison was a comfortable place in its way, but she had never taken to it—one turn at it had been enough for her. If it had been a policeman, or old Wesden, or any body but this boy three years her senior in age, many years her junior in knowledge of the world, she would have been phlegmatic to the last; but this boy had been kind to her twice in life—once on Christmas-eve, and once on a Saturday night before that, and she gave way somewhat, partly from her new and unaccountable weakness, partly because it was not a very stern face that looked down into hers.

"That's her, sure enough—eh, young gentleman?" remarked the police-officer in private clothes.

There was another pause—the girl's face blanched still more, and the look in her eyes became even more intense and eager; the boy glanced over his shoulder at the servants of the law.

"No—this isn't the girl. Oh no!"

"Are you quite certain? Stand up, Mattie."

Mattie turned out of her rug and stood up, erect and motionless, with her hands to her side, and her sharp black eyes still on Master Hinchford.

"Oh no! policeman. Ever so much taller!"

"Then we're on the wrong scent, it seems; and you'd better go home and leave it to us. Good-night, Mrs. Watts."

"Good-night," was the muttered response.

Policeman, detective, and Master Hinchford went down the stairs to the court, out of the

court into Kent Street, black and noisome—a turgid current, that wore only a semblance of stillness at hours more late than that.

"We'll let you know in the morning if there's any clew," said the detective. "Jem," to the policeman, "see this lad out of Kent Street."

"All right. I think I'd try old Simes for the brooch."

"I'll drop on him presently. Good-night, Jem."

"Good-night."

The boy and policeman went to the end of Kent Street together, then the boy bade the policeman good-night, ran across the road, recrossed in the fog a little lower down, and edged his way round St. George's Church into the old objectionable thoroughfare. A few minutes afterward he walked cautiously into the up-stairs room of Mrs. Watts, startling that good lady at her late tripe-supper very considerably.

"Hollo! young gentleman, what's up now?"

Mattie, who had been crouching before the fire, shrank toward it more, with her hands spread out to the blaze. She looked over her shoulder at the door, anticipating his two unwelcome companions to follow in his wake.

"Look here, Mattie," said he, in a very cool and business-like manner, "fair's fair, you know. I've let you off in a handsome manner, but I'm not going to lose the brooch. If it had been a trumpery brooch I shouldn't have cared so much."

"Was it real gold?"

"A real gold heart. I gave twelve and sixpence for it—I've been saving up for it ever since last April."

"I'll get it—I'll try and get it," said Mattie; "I haven't it myself now—it's been passed on. Upon my soul, I'll try my hardest to get it back; see if I don't."

"We'll all try our werry hardest, Sir," remarked Mrs. Watts, blandly.

"Ah! I dare say you will," said the boy, dubiously; "p'raps it had been better if I'd told the truth—my pa always says 'Stick to the truth, Sidney'; but you did look such a poor body to lock up that I told a lie for once. And who would have thought that you were a regular thief, Mattie?"

"I'm not a reg'lar—I don't like thieving—I've only thove when I've been werry—werry—hard druv; and I wasn't thinking of thieving, ony of getting warm, when you came bump against me in the doorway. I meant to have knocked and asked for a scrap to eat after a while, when they'd all got good-tempered over the beer and things. I'll bring the brooch—I'll get it back—leave it to me, Master Hinchford."

"How did you know my name?"

"Oh! I know every body about here—every body at your place, specially. Old Wesden and his gal in the blue meriner; and you, and your father with the red face and the white mustache and hair; and the servant, and the boy who takes the papers out, and is allus dropping them out of the oil-skin kiver, and every body. I'll bring the brooch, because you let me off. Trust me," she repeated again.

"Well, I'll trust you. Fair play, mind."

"And now, cut out of this: it isn't quite a safe place for you, and the people can't sleep if you talk, and you may catch the whooping-cough—"

"And you'll bring the brooch back? It's a bargain between us, Mattie."

"It's all right."

The youth re-echoed "all right," and went down stairs, watched from the dark landing by the girl who had robbed him. After a while the girl closed the door and followed slowly down stairs also. She was going in search of old Simes.

CHAPTER III.

LODGERS.

"DEPEND upon it, Sidney, you'll never set eyes on that brooch again."

"I'm not so sure about that," was the half-confident reply.

"And depend upon it, you don't deserve to see it, boy; and that I for one shall be glad if it never turns up."

"Pa! you really can't mean it."

"You told a lie about it, Sidney, and though you saved the girl from prison yet it was a big black lie all the same; and if luck follows it, why it's clean against the Bible."

"The girl looked so pitifully at me, you see—and I did think she might give the brooch back, out of gratitude."

"Gratitude in a young thief out of Kent Street?" laughed the father. "Well, it's a lesson in life to you, boy; and, after all, it only cost twelve and six-pence."

"Ah!" sighed Sidney, "it was a long pull."

"You'll have learned by this that a lie never prospers—that in the long-run it confronts you again when least expected, to make your cheek burn with your own baseness. I wonder now," gravely surveying his son, "whether you would have let that girl off if there had been no hope of the brooch coming to light."

The boy hesitated—then looked full at his sire.

"Well—I think I should."

"I think you told a lie for twelve and sixpence: the devil got a bargain from a Hinchford."

"You're rather hard upon me, pa," complained the boy, "and it wasn't for twelve and sixpence, because I never got the brooch back; and if I ever tell another lie, may I never see twelve and six-pence of my own again. There!"

"Bravo, Sid! That's a promise I'm glad to have wormed out of you, somehow. And yet—ye gods!—what a promise!"

"I'll keep it—see if I don't," said Master Sidney, with his lips compressed and his cheeks a little flushed.

The father shook his head slowly.

"You are going into business: you will be a business man—presently a City man—one who will drive hard bargains, make hard bargains, and have to fight his way through a hundred thousand liars. In the pursuit of money—above all, in the scraping together of that fugitive article—you must lie, or let a good chance go by to turn an honest penny. I can't expect you much better than other men, Sid."

"I wonder whether uncle lied much before—"

"He lied as little as he could, I dare say," quickly interrupted the father, "but he became a rich man, and he rose from City trading. Br—"

I told you once before—I think I have told you more than once—that I never wish to hear that uncle's name."

"Yes, but I had forgotten it for the moment—speaking of money-making and City men threw me a little off my guard."

"Yes, yes, I saw that, my boy—drop the curtain over the old grievance, and shut the past away from you and me. I don't complain—I'm happy enough—a little contents me. In the future, with a son to love and be proud of, I see the old man's happiest days!"

"We'll try our best, Sir, to make them so," exclaimed the boy.

"The Hinchfords are a buoyant race, and are not to be always kept down. I never heard of more than one of us a poor man in the same generation; the Hinchfords have intelligence, perseverance, and pluck, and they make their way in the world. If I have been unlucky, in my time, and have dropped down to a lodging in Great Suffolk Street, I see the next on the list"—laying his hand lightly on his boy's shoulder—"making his way to the higher ground, God willing."

"I haven't made much way yet," remarked the son, checking quietly the ambitious dreaming of the father. "I have only left school two months, and an office-boy in Hippen's firm is not a very great affair after all."

"It's a step forward—don't grumble—you'll push your way—you're a Hinchford."

"I'll do my best: I never was afraid of work."

"No: rather too fond of it, I fear. Sometimes I think there is no occasion to pore, pore, pore over those books of an evening, studying a lot of dry works which can never be of service to a City man."

"I should like to be *precious* clever!" was the boy's exclamation.

The father laughed, and added, with more satire than the boy detected,

"The precious clever ones seek out-of-the-way roads to fortune, and miss them: die in the work-house occasionally. It is only respectable mediocrity that jogs on to independence."

This strange dialogue between father and son occurred in the first-floor of the little stationer's shop in Great Suffolk Street. Father and son had lodged there eight years at least; Mrs. Hinchford, a delicate woman, several years her husband's junior, had died there: the place was home to the stiff-backed, white-haired man, who had prophesied a rise in life for his son. Eight or nine years ago the three Hinchfords had walked into Mr. Wesden's shop, and looked at the apartments that had been announced to be let from the front pane of the first-floor windows; had, after a little whispering together, decided on the rooms, and had never left them since, the wife excepted, who had died with her husband's hand in hers, praying for her boy's future. The Hinchfords had settled as firmly to those rooms on the first-floor, as Mr. Wesden, stationer, had settled to Great Suffolk Street in ages remote. The rent was low, the place was handy for Mr. Hinchford, who was clerk and book-keeper to a large builder, Southwark Bridge Road way; the attendance was not a matter of trouble to the Hinchfords, and the landlord and his wife were unobtrusive people, and preferred the lodgers' rent to their society.

For three years and a half the Hinchfords and Wesdens had only exchanged good-mornings in their meetings on the stairs—the Wesdens were humble, taciturn folk, and the Hinchfords proud and stand-offish. After that period Mrs. Hinchford fell ill, and Mrs. Wesden became of service to her; helped, at last, to nurse her, and keep her company during the long hours of her husband's absence at business, even to take care of her noisy boy down stairs, when his boisterousness in the holidays made his presence—much as the mother loved him—unbearable. The Wesdens were kind to the Hinchfords, and Mr. Hinchford, a man to be touched by true sympathy, unbent at that time. He was a proud man, but a sensible one, and he never forgot a kindness proffered him. He had belonged to a higher estate once, and, dropping suddenly to a lower, he had brought his old notions with him, to render him wretched and uneasy. He had thought himself above those Wesdens—petty hucksters, as they were—until the time when Mrs. Wesden became a kind nurse to his wife, almost a mother to his boy; and then he felt his own inferiority to a something in them, or belonging to them, and was forever after that intensely grateful.

When Mrs. Hinchford died, and the lonely man had got over his first grief, he sought Mr. Wesden's company more often, smoked a friendly pipe with him in the back parlor now and then—begged to do so, for refuge from that solitary drawing-room up stairs, filled with such sad memories as it was then. Hinchford and Wesden did not talk much, the latter was not fond of talking; and they were odd meetings enough, either in the parlor, or in the up-stairs room, as business necessitated.

They exchanged a few words about the weather, and the latest news in the papers, and then subsided into their tobacco-smoke till it was time to say good-night; but Wesden was company for Hinchford in his trouble, and when time rendered the trouble less acute, each had fallen into the habit of smoking a pipe together once or twice a week, and did not care to break it.

In the parlor-meetings Mrs. Wesden would bring her spare form and pinched countenance between them, and would sit darning socks and saying little to relieve the monotony—unless the little girl were sitting up late, and her vivacity required attention or reprimand. They were quiet evenings with a vengeance, and Hinchford took his cue from the couple who managed business in Great Suffolk Street—and managed it well, for they minded their own, and were not disturbed by other people's.

While we are looking back—taking a passing glimpse over our shoulder at the by-gones—we may as well add that the Wesdens were naturally quiet people, and did not put on company-manners for Mr. Hinchford in particular. Thirty years ago they had married and opened shop in Great Suffolk Street; struggled for a living without making a fuss about it; lived frugally, pinched themselves in many ways which the world never knew any thing about; surmounted the first obstacles in their way, and then, in the same quiet manner, saved a little money, then a little more, and then, as if by habit, continued saving, maintaining the same appearance in themselves, and the same quaint stolidity toward their

neighbors. They had even borne their family troubles quietly, losing three children out of four without any great demonstration of grief—keeping their lamentations for after-business hours, and their inflexible faces for their curious neighbors, to whom they seldom spoke, and from whom they chose no friends. They were a couple contented with themselves and their position in society—a trifle too frugal, if not near—staid, jog-trot, business people of week-days, church-goers who patronized free seats for economy's sake on Sundays.

Once a year the Wesdens launched out—celebrating, in the month of January, the natal day of the bright-faced girl in whom so much love was centred, for whom they were working steadily and persistently still. They had a juvenile party on that day always, and Harriet's school-friends came in shoals to the feast, and Mr. Wesden presented his compliments to Mr. Hinchford, and begged the favor of borrowing the drawing-room for one night, and hoped also to have the honor of Mr. Hinchford's company, and Master Hinchford's company, on that occasion—all of which being responded to in the affirmative, affairs went off, as a rule, satisfactorily, until that momentous night in January, when Master Sidney Hinchford lost his brooch.

This incident altered many things, and led to many things undreamed of by the characters yet but in outline in these pages; without it we should not have sat down to tell the history of these people—bound up so inextricably with that poor wanderer of the streets whom we have heard called Mattie.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. HINCHFORD'S EXPERIMENT.

THE middle of March; six weeks since the robbery of Master Hinchford's gold heart; a wet night in lieu of a foggy one; a cold wind sweeping down the street and dashing the rain all manner of ways; pattens and clogs clicking and shuffling about the pavement of Great Suffolk Street; the stationery shop open, and Mr. Wesden at seven o'clock sitting behind the counter waiting patiently for customers.

Being a wet night, and customers likely to be scarce in consequence, Mr. Wesden had carefully turned out one gas-burner and lowered the two others in the window to imperceptible glimmers of a despondent character, and then taken his seat behind the counter ready for any amount of business that might turn up between seven and half past nine p.m. The gas was burning more brightly in the back parlor, through the closed glass door of which Mrs. Wesden was cutting out shirts, and Miss Wesden learning, or feigning to learn, her school-lessons for the morrow.

Mr. Wesden was devoting his mind purely to business. In his shop he never read a book or looked at a newspaper, but waited for customers, always in one position, with his head slightly bent forward, and his hands clutching his knees. In that position the largest order had not the power to stagger him; the smallest order could not take him off his guard. He bent his mind to business; he was "on duty" for the evening.

Mr. Wesden was a short, spare man, with a narrow chest, a wrinkled face, a sharp nose, and a sandy head of hair—a man whose clothes were shabby and ill fitted him, the latter not to be wondered at, Mrs. Wesden being the tailor, and making every thing at home. This saved money and satisfied Mr. Wesden, who cared not for appearances, had a soul above the fashion, and a faith in his wife's judgment. In the old days Mrs. Wesden was forced to turn tailor and trowsers-maker, or see her husband without trowsers at all; tailoring had become a habit since then, and agreed with her; it saved money still, and economy was ever a virtue with this frugal pair.

Mr. Wesden in his shop-suit then—that was his shabbiest suit, and exceedingly shabby it was—sat and waited for customers. He waited patiently; to those who strayed in for sheets of note-paper, books to read, shirt-buttons, tapes, or beads, he was very attentive, settling the demands with promptitude and dispatch, saying little save "a wet evening," and not to be led into a divergence about a hundred matters foreign to business, until the articles were paid for and the money in his till. Then, if a few loquacious customers would gossip about the times, he condescended to listen, regarding them from his meaningless gray eyes, and responding in monosyllables, when occasion or politeness required some kind of answer. But he was always glad to see their faces turned toward the door; they wearied him very much, these people, and it was odd they could not take away the articles they had purchased, and go home in quietness.

To people in the streets who, caught by some attraction in his window, stopped and looked thereat, he was watchful from behind his counter—speculating as to whether they were probable purchasers or had felonious designs. He was a suspicious man to a certain extent, as well as a careful one; and no one lingered at his window without becoming an object of interest from behind the tobacco-jars and penny numbers. On this evening a haggard white face—whether a girl's or woman's he could not make out for the mist on the window-panes—had appeared several times before the shop-window, and looked in, over the beads, and tapes, and through packets of paper, at him. Not interested at any thing for sale, but keeping an eye on him, he felt assured.

He had a bill in the window—"A BOY WANTED"—and if it had been a boy's face flitting about in the rain there he should not have been so full of doubts as to the object with which he was watched; but there was a battered bonnet on the head of the watcher, and therefore no room for speculation concerning sex, at least.

After an hour's fugitive dodging, Mattie—for it was she—came at a slow rate into the shop. She walked forward very feebly, and took a firm grip of the counter to steady herself.

Mr. Wesden critically surveyed her from his post of observation; she did not speak, but she kept her black eyes directed to the face in front of her.

"Well, what do you want, Mattie?" asked Mr. Wesden, finally.

"Nothin'—that is to buy."

"Ah! then we've nothing to give away for you any more."

"I want to speak to Master Hinchford," said Mattie; "I've come about the brooch."

"Not brought it back!" exclaimed Mr. Wesden, roused out of his apathetic demeanor by this assertion.

"I wish I had: no, I only want to see him."

Mr. Wesden called to his wife and delivered Mattie's request through the glass, keeping one eye on the new-comer all the while. Mrs. Wesden sent her daughter up stairs with the message, and presently from a side door opening into the shop Miss Wesden made her appearance.

"If you please, will you walk up stairs?"

Harriet Wesden spoke very kindly, and edged away from Mattie as she advanced—Mattie was the girl who had stolen the brooch, a strange creature from an uncivilized world, and the stationer's little daughter was afraid of her old pensioner.

The girl from the streets stared at Harriet Wesden in her turn, looked very intently at her warm dress and white pinafore, and then looked back at Mr. Wesden.

"May I go up, Sir?"

"I don't see why they can't come down here," he grumbled; "but you must go up if they want to see you. Stop here, Harriet, and call Ann—you might catch something, girl."

Ann was called, and presently a broad-faced, red-armed girl made her appearance.

"Show a light to this girl up stairs, Ann."

"This girl—here?"

"Yes—that girl there."

"Oh! lawks—so you've turned up agin."

Mattie did not answer—she seemed very weak and ill, and not inclined to waste words foreign to her motive in appearing there. She followed the servant up stairs, pausing on the first landing to take breath.

"What's the matter with you—ain't you well?" asked the servant-maid.

"No, I ain't—I'm just the other thing."

"Been ill?"

"Scarlet-fever—that's all."

"Oh! lor a mussy on us!—keep further off! I can't bide fevers. We shall all be as red as lobsters in the morning."

"It ain't catching now—Mother Watts didn't catch it—I wish she had!"

"Will you go up stairs now?"

"Let's get a breath—I ain't so strong as I used to be. Now then."

Up the next flight, to the door of the first-floor front, where Sidney Hinchford, pale with suspense, was standing.

"Have you got it?—have you got it, Mattie?"

"No: I ain't got nothin'."

"Cept a fever, Master Sidney—tell your father to look out."

A thin, large-veined hand protruded from the door and dragged Master Hinchford suddenly backward into the room; a tall, military-looking old gentleman, with white hair and white mustache, the instant afterward occupied the place, and looked down sternly at the small intruder.

"Keep where you are: I didn't know you had a fever, girl. Ann Packet, put the light on the bracket. That will do."

Ann Packet set the chamber candlestick on a little bracket outside the drawing-room, drew

her clothes tightly round her limbs, and keeping close to the wall, scuttled past the girl, whom fever had sorely stricken lately. Mattie dropped on to the stairs, placed her elbows on her knees, took her chin between her claw-like hands, and stared up at Mr. Hinchford.

"I don't think you can catch any thin' from me, guv'nor."

Governor looked down at Mattie, and reddened a little.

"I'm not afraid of fever: it's only the boy I'm thinking about. Sidney," he called.

"Yes, pa."

"You can hear if I leave the door open. Now, girl," addressing the diminutive figure on the stairs, "if you haven't brought the brooch what was the good of coming here?"

"To let you know I tried—that's all. I thought that all you might think that I'd stuck to it, you see. But I did try my hardest to get it back, because the young gent let me off when the bobbies would have walked me to quod. Lor bless you, Sir, I'm not a reg'lar!"

"A what?"

"A reg'lar thief, Sir. They've been trying hard to make me—Mother Watts, and old Simes, and the rest—but it don't do. I was locked up once afore mother died, and mother was sorry—awful sorry, for *her*—you should have just heard her go on, when I come out agin. Oh no, I'm not a reg'lar—I sings about the street for ha'pence, and goes to fairs, and begs—and so on, but I don't take things werry often. I'm a stray, Sir!"

"Ah! God help you!" murmured the old gentleman.

"I never had no father—and mother's dead now. I'm 'bliged to shift for myself. And oh! I just was hard up when I tooked the brooch."

"And what became of it?"

"Old Simes stuck to it, Sir. I went to him on the werry night after I had seen Master Hinchford, and he said he'd sold it for ten-pence, but he'd try and get it back for me, which he never did, Sir—never."

"No, I suppose not," was the dry response.

"And the next day I caught the fever, and got in the workus, somehow; and when I came back to Kent Street, last week that was, old Simes had seen nothin' more of the brooch, and Mother Watts had forgot all about it—so she said!" was the disparaging comment.

"And you came hither to tell us all this?"

"Yes, I thought you'd like to know I *did* try, and that they were too deep for me. My eye! they just are deep, those two!"

"Why didn't you stay in the work-house?"

"Can't bide the workus, Sir—they drop upon you too much. It's the wust place going, Sir, and no one takes to it."

"You're an odd girl."

Mr. Hinchford leaned his back against the door-post, and surveyed the ragged and forlorn girl on the lower stair. He was perplexed with this child, and her wistful eyes, keen and glittering as steel, made him feel uncomfortable. Here was a mystery, a something unaccountable, and he could not probe to its depths, or tell which was false and which was genuine in the character of this motherless girl before him. He had prided himself all his life in being a judge of

character—a man of observation, who saw the flaw in the diamond—the real face behind the paint, varnish, and pasteboard. He had judged his own brother in times past, he had mixed much with the world and gleaned much from hard experience thereof, and yet a child like this disturbed him. He fancied that he could read a struggle for something better and more pure in Mattie's life, and that Fate was against her and drawing her back to the shadows from which she, as if by a noble instinct, was endeavoring to emerge.

He felt curious concerning her.

"What do you intend to do now?"

"Lor, Sir, I don't know. It depends upon what turns up."

"You will not thieve any more?"

"Not if I can help it; but if I can't help it, Sir, I must go to school at Simes's. He teaches lots of gals to get a living!"

Mr. Hinchford shuddered. There was a pause, during which the head of Master Hinchford peered through the door to note how affairs were progressing. The father detected the movement, and when the head was hastily withdrawn he drew the door still closer, and retained a grip of the handle for precaution's sake.

"You don't know what your next step will be? You'll try to live honestly, you say?"

"I'll try the ingun dodge. You get's through a heap of inguns at a ha'penny a lot, if the perlice will only let you be."

"And your stock in trade?"

"What's that?"

"How will you begin? Where are the onions to come from?"

"I shall sing for them to-morrow—my voice is comin' round a bit, Mother Watts says."

Mr. Hinchford pulled at his long white mustache—the girl's confidence and coolness induced him to linger there—something in his own heart led him to continue the conversation. He was a philosopher, a student of human nature, and this was a singular specimen before him.

"What could you live and keep honest upon?"

"Tuppence a day in summer—fourpence in winter. Summer a gal can sleep any where—there's some prime places in the Borough Market, and lots o' railway arches, Dockhead way; but it nips you awful hard when the frost's on."

"Well—here's six-pence to set up in business with, Mattie—and as long as you can show me an honest front, and can come here every Saturday night and say, 'I've been honest all the week,' why, I'll stand the same amount."

Mattie's eyes sparkled at this rise in life.

"I'll borrow a basket, and buy some inguns to-morrow. P'raps you buy inguns sometimes, and old Mr. Wesden down stairs, too. Yes, Sir, it's the connection that budes one up!" she said, with the gravity of an old woman.

"I see. I'll speak to Mr. Wesden about his custom, Mattie. You can go now."

"Thankee, Sir."

She rose to her feet, went a few steps down stairs, paused, and looked back.

"What is it, Mattie?"

"I hope the young gen'leman isn't a-fretting much about his brooch."

"Here, young gentleman," called the father, "do you hear that?"

Master Hinchford laughed from within.

"Oh no!—I don't fret."

"P'raps some day I shall have saved up enuf to pay him back. That's a *rum* idea, isn't it, Sir?"

"Not a bad one, Mattie. Think it over."

"Yes, Sir."

Mattie departed, and Mr. Hinchford returned to the sitting-room. Master Hinchford, buried in books, was sitting at the centre table.

"Are you going at figures to-night?"

"Just for a little while, I think."

"You'll ruin your eyes—I've said so fifty times!"

"Better have weak eyes than weak brains, Sir."

"Not the general idea, lad."

After a while, and when Master Hinchford was scratching away with his pen, the father said,

"You don't say any thing about Mattie."

"I think it was very kind of you," said the youth; "and I think, somehow, that Mattie will be grateful."

"Pooh! pooh!" remarked the father, "you'll never make a first-rate city man if you believe in gratitude. Look at the world sternly, boy. Put not your trust in any thing turning out the real and genuine article: work every thing by figures."

Master Hinchford looked at his sire, as though he scarcely understood him.

"I must bring you up to understand human nature, Sid—what a bad article it is—plated with a material that soon wears off, if rubbed smartly. Human nature is every where the same, and if you be only on your guard you may take advantage of it, instead of letting it take advantage of you. Now this girl is a specimen, which, at my own expense, we will experiment-alize upon. In that stray, my boy, you shall see the natural baseness of mankind—or girlkind."

"Don't you think that she'll come again?"

"For the six-pence, to be sure! Every Saturday night, with a long story of how honest she has been all the week. Here we shall see a girl who, by her own statement and with a struggle, can keep honest now—note the effect of indiscriminate alms-giving."

"Of rewarding a girl for stealing my brooch, pa."

"Ah!—exactly. Some people who didn't understand me would set me down for a weak-minded old fool. In studying human nature, one must act oddly with odd specimens. And this girl—who came to tell us she had not brought the brooch back—I am just a little—curious—concerning!"

CHAPTER V.

SET UP IN BUSINESS.

I AM afraid that the reader will be very much disgusted with us as story-tellers when we inform him that all these details are but preliminary to our story proper—a kind of prologue in six chapters to the comedy, melodrama, or tragedy—which?—that the curtain will rise upon in our next book. Still they are details without which our characters and their true positions on our stage would not have been clearly defined; and

in the up-hill struggles of our stray perhaps some student of human nature, like Mr. Hinchford, may take some little interest.

For they were real up-hill struggles to better herself, and therefore worthy of notice. Remark them, and knowing their genuineness, it has struck us that even from these crude materials a kind of heroine might be fashioned—not the heroine of a high-class book—that is, a “book for the Boudoir”—but of a book that will at least attempt to draw a certain phase of life as plainly as it passed the writer’s eyes once.

Let us, ere we begin our story, then, speak of this Mattie a little more—this girl who was not a “reg’lar”—who had never been brought up to “the profession”—who was merely a Stray! Let us even watch her in her new vocation—set up in life with Mr. Hinchford’s six-pence—and note by what strange accident it changed the tenor of her life; and at least set her above the angry dash of those waves which, day after day, engulf so many.

All that we know of Mattie, all that Mattie knew of herself, the reader is fully acquainted with. Mattie’s mother, a beggar, a tramp, occasionally a thief, died in a low lodging-house, and, with some flash of the better instincts at the last, begged her child to keep good, *if she could*. And the girl, by nature impressionable, only by the force of circumstance callous and cunning, tried to subsist on the streets without filching her neighbors’ goods; wavered in her best intentions, as well she might, when the world was extra vigorous with her; grew more worldly with the world’s hardness, and stole now and then for bread, when there was no bread offered her; made friends with young thieves—“reg’lars”—of both sexes; constituted them her playmates, and rehearsed with them little dramas of successful peculation; fell into bad hands—receivers of stolen goods, and owners of dens where thieves nightly congregated; regarded the police as natural enemies, the streets as home, and those who filled them as men and women to be imposed upon, to be whined out of money by a beggar’s plaint, amused out of it by a song in a shrill falsetto, tricked out of it by a quick hand in the depths of their pockets. Still Mattie never became a “reg’lar;” she earned money enough “to keep life in her;” she had become inured to the streets, and had a fear, a very uncommon one in girls of her age and mode of living, of the police-station and the magistrate. Possibly her voice saved her; she had sung duets with her mother before death had stepped between them, and she sold ballads on her own account when the world was all before her where to choose. She was a girl, too, whom a little contented; one who could live on a little, and make shift, terrible shift, when luck ran against her. Above all, her tempters, the Watts, Simes’, and others, festering among the Kent Street courts, were cruel and hard with her, and she kept out of their way so long as it was possible.

Given the same monotony of existence for a few more years, and Mattie would have become a tramp perhaps, oscillating from fair to fair, race-course to race-course, losing true feeling, modesty, heart and soul, at every step. She had already tried the fairs within ten miles—the races at Hampton and Epsom, etc., and had earned money at them—she was seeing her way to busi-

ness next summer, at the time she was interested in one particular house in Great Suffolk Street, Borough.

Mattie was fond of pictures, and therefore partial to Mr. Wesden’s shop, where the cheap periodicals and tinsel portraits of celebrated stage-ranters, in impossible positions, were displayed—fond, too, of watching Mr. Wesden’s daughter in her perambulations backward and forward to a day-school in Trinity Street, and critically surveying her bright dresses, her neat shoes and boots, her hats for week-days, and drawn bonnets for Sundays, with a far-off longing, such as a destitute child entertains for one in a comfortable position—such a feeling as we envious children of a larger growth may experience when our big friends flaunt their wealth in our eyes, and talk of their hounds, their horses, and their princely estates.

“Oh, to be only Harriet Wesden!” was Mattie’s secret wish—to dress like her, look like her, be followed by a mother’s anxious eyes down the street; to have a father to see her safely across the broad thoroughfare lying between Great Suffolk Street and school; to go to school, and be taught to read and write and grow up good—what happiness, unattainable and intangible, to dream of!

Eugene Sue, I think, tried to show the bright side of Envy, and the good it might effect; and I suppose there are many species of Envy, or else that we do not call things invariably by their right names. Mattie at least envied the stationer’s daughter; Miss Wesden was a princess to her, and lived in fairy-land; and in seeing how happy she was, and what good spirits she had, Mattie’s own life seemed dark enough; but that other life which Mattie tried to keep aloof from, denser and viler still. Harriet Wesden was the heroine of her story, and in a far-off distant way—never guessed at by its object—Harriet Wesden was loved, especially after she had begun to notice Mattie’s attention to the pictures in the window, and to change them for her sole edification more often than was absolutely necessary.

Mattie was well known in Great Suffolk Street; they knew her at Wesden’s—nearly every shop-keeper knew her, and exchanged a word or two with her occasionally—Great Suffolk Street was her beat. In health Mattie was a good-tempered, sharp-witted girl—bearing the ills of her life with composure—selling lucifers and singing for a living.

They trusted her in Great Suffolk Street; the poor folk living at the back thereof bought lucifers of her of a Saturday night, and asked how she was getting on; the boys guarding their masters’ shop-boards nodded in a patronizing way at her; now and then a plate of broken victuals was tendered her from some well-to-do shop-keeper, who could afford to part with it and not miss it either. Before her fever she had had a little “c’nection,” and she set to work to get it up again when the Hinchford six-pence heaped her basket with onions.

That was the turning-point of Mattie’s life; after that a little woman with an eye to business; a small female coster-monger, with a large basket before her suspended by a strap; troubled and kept moving on by policemen, but earning her fair modicum of profit; quick with her eyes, ready with her answers, happy as a queen whose

business was brisk, and lodging away from Mother Watts and old Simes, whose acquaintance she had quietly dropped.

Mattie still watched Harriet Wesden from a distance; still felt the same strange interest in that girl, one year her senior, growing up so pretty, while she became so plain and weather-beaten; experiencing still the same attraction for that house in particular; knowing each of its inmates by heart, and feeling, since the brooch defalcation, a part of the history attached to the establishment. When the Wesdens made up their minds to send Harriet to boarding-school, by way of a finish to her education, Mattie learned the news, and was there to see the cab drive off; Mattie even told Ann Packet, servant to the Wesdens, and regular purchaser of Mattie's "green stuff," that she should miss her werry much, and Suffolk Street wouldn't be half Suffolk Street after she was gone; which observation being reported to Mrs. Wesden, directed more attention to the stray from that quarter, and made one more friend at least.

One more—for Mattie had found a friend in the tall, stiff-backed, stern-looking old gentleman of the name of Hinchford. The lodger's philosophy had all gone wrong: his knowledge of human nature had been at fault, his prophecies concerning Mattie's ingratitude had proved fallacious, and her steady application to business had greatly interested him. He was a sterling character this old gentleman, for he confessed that he had been wrong; and he now held forth Mattie's industry as an example of perseverance in the world to his son, just as in the past he had intended her as a striking proof of the world's ingratitude.

The climax was reached two years after his dialogue with Mattie on the stairs—when Mattie was thirteen years of age, and Master Hinchford sixteen—when Mattie still hawked goods in Suffolk Street, quite a woman of the world, and deeply versed in market-prices—one who had not even at that time attained to the dignity of shoes and stockings.

Mr. Wesden, the quiet man of business, was in his shop as usual when Mattie walked in, basket and all.

Mr. Wesden regarded her gravely, and shook his head. Onions and some sweet herbs had been speculated in that morning, and no further articles were required at that establishment.

"If you please, I don't want you to buy, Mr. Wesden," said she, "but will you be good enough to send that up to Master Hinchford?"

Mr. Wesden looked at the small, dirty piece of paper in which something was wrapped, and then at Mattie.

"It's honestly come by, Sir," said Mattie.

"I never said it wasn't," he responded.

Mattie retired into the street—it was a Saturday night, and there were many customers abroad—she was doing a flourishing trade, when a tall youth caught her by the arm, and dragged her round the corner of the first street.

"Oh! don't pinch my arm so, Master Hinchford."

"What's the twelve and six-pence for, Mattie?—not for the—not for the—"

"Yes, the *brooch*! I've been a-saving up, and keeping myself down for it, and now it's easy on my mind."

"I won't have it. I've been thinking about it, and I won't have it, Mattie."

"Please do. I've been trying so hard to wipe that off. I'm quite well now. I've got the c'necktion all right, and shall save it all up agin, and the winter's arf over, and when Miss Wesden comes back, you can buy her another brooch with it, and nobody disapinted."

The youth laughed, and colored, and shook his head.

"I won't take twelve and six-pence from you, I tell you. Why, Mattie, you don't know the value of money, or you'd never fling it away like this. Why, it's a fortune to you."

"No—it's been a *weight*—that twelve and six, somehow. I've been a thief until to-night—now it's wiped clean. Don't try to make me a thief agin by giving it on me back. Oh! don't please stop my trade like this!"

"Well, I shall make you out in time, Mattie—*perhaps*."

Master Hinchford pocketed the money, and walked away slowly. Mattie returned to her "c'necktion." Mr. Hinchford sat and philosophized to himself all the evening on the impracticability of arriving at a thorough understanding of human nature, as exemplified in "girlkind."

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF THE PROLOGUE.

HARD times set in after that night. The winter was half over, Mattie had said; but the worst half was yet to come, and for that she, with many thousands like her, had made but little preparation. The worst half of the frost of that year set in like a blight upon the London streets, froze the gutters, raised the price of coals, sent provisions up to famine figures, cut off all the garden stuff, and threw such fugitive traders as Mattie completely out of work. Hers became a calling that required capital now; even the green-grocers' shops, Borough way, were scantily stocked; the market itself was not what it used to be when things were flourishing, and oh! the prices that were asked in those times!

Poverty of an ill aspect set in soon after the frost; crime set in soon after poverty: when the work-houses are besieged by hungry claimants for relief the prisons are always extra full. Suffolk Street, the streets branching thitherward to Southwark Bridge, the narrow lanes and turnings round the Queen's Bench, in the Borough Road and verging toward Union Street, were all haunted by those phantoms that had set in with the frost. There was danger in the streets as well as famine, and money was hard to earn, and hold when earned! Small shop-keepers with large families closed their shutters, and locked themselves in with desolation; men out of work grew desperate; the streets were empty of the basket-women and coster-mongers, and swarming in lieu thereof with beggars and thieves; even the police, nipped at the heart by the frost, were harder on society that stopped the way, and had little mercy even on old faces. Mattie's was an old face which stopped the way at that time—Mattie, basketless and onionless, and trying lucifers again, and essaying on Saturday nights—when workmen's wages were paid—a song or two opposite the public houses.

In this old fashion Mattie earned a few pence at times; she was small for her age—very small—and the anxious-looking face touched those who had odd coppers to spare. But it was a task to live, notwithstanding; and Mattie fought hard with the rest of the waifs and strays, who had a tough battle to wage that winter-time. "Luck went dead against her," as she termed it. She was barred from the market by want of capital. One lot of goods that she had speculated in never went off her hands, or rather her basket, on which they withered more and more with the frost, until they became unsalable products; and there was no demand for lucifers or any thing!

Mattie was nearly starving when the old tempter turned up in Great Suffolk Street—at the time when she was weak, and the police had been more than commonly "down on her," and she had not taken a half-penny that day—at a time when the tempter *does* turn up as a general rule; that is, when we are waiting very anxiously for an excuse.

"What! Mattie! Lor! the sight o' time since I set eyes on you!"

"What! Mrs. Watts!"

"What are you doing, girl? Not much for yourself, I should think," with a disparaging glance at the tattered habiliments of our heroine.

"Not much just now, Mrs. Watts: hard lines it is."

"Ah! well, it may be. You allus wanted pluck, Mattie, like your mother. And hard lines it is just now, for those who stand nice about trifles. What's that in your hand, gal?"

"Congreve lights."

"What! still at Congreve lights? If I shouldn't hate the werry sight and smell on 'em by this time!"

"So I do," said Mattie, sullenly.

"Come home with me, and let's have a bit o' talk together, Mattie; there's a friend or two o' your age a-coming to have a little talk with me to-night."

"Don't you keep a lodging-house now?"

"No: a little shop for bones and bottles and such things; and we has a party in the back parlor twice a week, and something nice and hot for supper."

"A school—on your own hook?" said Mattie, quickly.

"Oh! how sharp we gets as we grows up! But you allus was as sharp as any needle; and I was only saying to Simes but yesterday, if I could just drop on little Mattie, she'd be the werry gal to do us credit—she would."

"I've been shifting for myself these last two years and odd, and I got on tidy till the frost set in, and now it's *all up*!"

"Ah! all up; precisely so."

Mrs. Watts did not detect the tragic element in Mattie's peroration. She had sallied forth in search of her, and had found her in the streets ragged and penniless and hungry. It was worth while to speculate in Mattie now; to show her some degree of kindness; to lure her back to the old haunts, and something worse than the old life. She began her temptations, and Mattie listened and trembled—the night was cold, and she had not tasted food that day. Mrs. Watts kept her hand upon the girl, and ex-

plained upon the advantages she had to offer now; even attempted to draw Mattie along with her.

"Wait a bit—don't be in a hurry," said Mattie: "I'll come presently p'raps—not just now."

"Oh! I'm not so sweet on you," said Mrs. Watts, aggrieved; "come if you like—stop away if you like—it's all one to me. I'll go about my rump-steaks for supper, and you can stay here and starve, if you prefer it."

This dialogue occurred only a short distance from Mr. Wesden's shop, when Mr. Wesden was putting up the shutters in his own quiet way, with very little noise, his boy having left him at a moment's notice. Mrs. Wesden, who had her fears for his back—Mr. W. had had a sensitive back for years—was dragging the shutters out from under the shop-board—thin slips of wood, that required not any degree of strength to manage. There were six shutters—at the third Mr. Wesden said,

"There's Mattie."

"Ah! poor girl!"

At the fifth he added,

"With an old woman that I don't like the style of very much."

Mrs. Wesden went to the door, and looked down the street at the tempter and the tempted—Mattie was under the lamp, and the face was a troubled one, on which the gas-jet flickered. When the sixth shutter was up, and the iron band that secured them all firmly screwed into the door-post, the quiet couple stood side by side and watched the conflict to its abrupt conclusion. Both guessed what the subject had been: there was something of the night-bird and the jail-bird about Mrs. Watts that was easy of detection.

Mrs. Wesden touched her husband's arm.

"Danger, John!"

"Ah!"

"And that girl has been a-going on so quietly for years, and getting her own living, and she without a father and a mother to care for her—not like our Harriet."

"No."

"And the way she brought back the money for that brooch."

"Yes; that was funny."

"I don't see the fun of it, John."

"That was good of her."

"Do you know I've been thinking, John, we might find room for her; those boys are a great trouble to us, and if we had a girl it might answer better to take the papers out, and she might serve in the shop."

"Serve in my shop—good Lord!"

"Some day when we could trust her, I mean; and she could sleep with Ann; and I dare say she would come for her keep in these times. And we might be saving her—God knows from what!"

"Mrs. Wesden, you're as full of fancies as ever you can stick."

"I've a fancy to help her in these hard times, John; and when helping her won't ruin us—us who have put by now a matter of three thou—"

"Hush!"

"And when helping her won't ruin us, but get rid of those plagues of boys, John. Fancy our Harriet in the streets like that!"

She pointed to Mattie standing alone there, still under the gas-lamp, deep in thought. Mr.

Wesden looked ; but his lined face was expressive of little sympathy, his wife thought.

"We're hard pushed for a boy—the bill's no sooner down than up again—try a girl, John!" "If you'll get in out of the cold, Mrs. W., I'll think of it."

Mrs. Wesden retired, and Mr. Wesden kept his place by the open door, and his quiet eyes on Mattie. He was a man who did nothing in a hurry, and whose actions were ruled by grave deliberation. He did not confess to his wife that of late years he had been interested in Mattie; watched her from under his papers in the shop-window; saw her business-like habits, her method, her briskness over her scanty wares, her cleverness even in dodging her *bête noire* the policeman. He was a man, moreover, who went to church and read his Bible, and had many good thoughts beneath his occasional brusqueness and invariable immobility. A very quiet man, a man more than ordinarily cautious, hard to please, and still harder to rouse.

In shutting up his shop that night he had caught one or two fragments of the dialogue, and he knew more certainly than his wife that Mattie was being tempted back to the old life. Of that life he knew every thing; he had learned it piece by piece without affecting to take an interest in the matter; he even knew that Mattie had long taken a fancy—an odd fancy—to his daughter; that she often inquired about her, and her boarding-school, of Ann Packet, domestic to the house of Wesden.

He thought of Mattie's temptation, then of Mrs. Wesden's extraordinary suggestion. He was a lord of creation, and if he had a weakness it was in pooh-poohing the suggestions of his helpmate, although he adopted them in nine cases out of ten, disguising them, as he thought, by some little variation, and bringing them forward in due course as original productions of his own teeming brain.

And boys *had* worried him for years—lost his numbers, been behindhand with the *Times* to his best customers, insulted those customers when reprimanded, and set the blame of delay at his door, played and fought with other boys before his very shop-front, broken his windows in putting up the shutters, had even paid visits to his till, and surreptitiously made off with stock, and had never in his memory of boys, industrious or otherwise, possessed one civil, clean-faced, decent youth.

"Suppose I had Mattie on trial for a week," he said, at last, and looked toward the lamp-post. Mattie was gone: a black shadow, exactly like

her, was hurrying away down the street toward the Borough, running almost, and with her hands to her head, as though a crowd of thoughts was stunning her.

Mr. Wesden never accounted for leaving his shop-door open without warning his wife—for running at his utmost speed after the girl.

At the corner of Great Suffolk Street he overtook her.

"Where are you going? What are you running for?" he asked, indignantly.

Mattie started, looked at him, recognized him. "Nothin'—partic'ler—is any think the matter?"

"How—how—should you—like—to be—a news-boy?" he panted.

No circumlocution in Mr. Wesden, straight to the point as an arrow.

"Yours? you wouldn't trust me—you never gives trust."

"I've—I've thought of trying you."

"You?" she said, again.

"Yes, me."

"Well, I'd do any think to get an honest living; but I was giving up the thoughts o' it, it's so hard for the likes of us, Master."

"Come back, and I'll tell you what I've been thinking about, Mattie."

Not a word about what Mrs. Wesden had been thinking about—such is man's selfishness and narrow-mindedness.

Mattie went back—for good!

On this prologue to our story we can afford to drop the curtain, leaving our figures in outline, and waiting a better time to paint our characters, such as they are, more fully. We need not dwell upon Mattie's trial, upon Mattie's change of costume, and initiation into an old frock and boots of the absent Harriet—of the many accidents of life at Wesden, stationer's, accidents which led to the wanderer's settling down, a member of the household, an item in that household expenditure. Let the time roll on a year or two, during which Mr. Wesden's back grew worse, and Mrs. Wesden's hair grew gray, and let the changes that have happened to our friends speak for themselves in the story we have set ourselves to write.

Leave we, then, the Stray on the threshold of her new estate, standing in Harriet Wesden's dress, thinking of her future; the shadow-land from which she has emerged behind her, and new scenes, new characters beyond there, beneath the bright sky, where all looks so radiant from the distance.

BOOK II

THE NEW ESTATE.

CHAPTER I.

HOME FOR GOOD.

THREE years make but little difference in the general aspect of a poor neighborhood. The same shops doing their scanty business; the same loiterers at street-corners; the same watch from hungry eyes upon the loaves and fishes behind the window-glass; the same slipshod men women and children hustling one another on the pavement, in all weathers, "doing their bit of marketing;" the same dogs sniffing about the streets, and prowling round the butchers' shops.

An observer might detect many changes in the names over the shop-fronts, certainly. Business goes wrong with a great many in three years; capital is small to work with in some instances; and when the rainy day comes, in due course, by the stern rule by which rainy days are governed, the resistance is feeble, and the weakest put the shutters up, sell off at an alarming sacrifice, and go, with wives and children, still further on the downhill road. There are seizures for rent, writs issued on delinquents, stern authority cutting off the gas and water, sterner authorities interfering with the weights and measures, which, in poor neighborhoods, *will* get light occasionally; brokers' men making their quarterly raids, and still further perplexing those to whom life is a struggle, desperate and intense.

Amidst the changes in Great Suffolk Street one business remains firm and presents its wonted aspect. Over the little stationer's shop, the old established emporium for every thing in a small way, is still inscribed the name of Wesden, has been repainted the name of Wesden in white letters, on a chocolate ground, as though there were nothing in the cares of business to daunt the tradesman who began life there, young and blooming.

There are changes among the papers in the windows, the sensation pennyworths, the pious pennyworths, the pennyworths started for the amelioration and mental improvement of the working classes, unfortunate pennyworths, that never get on, and which the working classes turn their backs upon, hating a moral in every other line as naturally as we do. The stock of volumes in the library is on the increase; the window, counter, shelves, and drawers are all well filled; Mr. Wesden deals in postage and receipt stamps, ever a good sign of capital to spare, and has turned the wash-house into a warehouse, where reams of paper, envelopes, and goods too numerous to mention, are biding their time to see daylight in Great Suffolk Street.

Changes are more apparent in the back-parlor, which has been home to Mr. and Mrs. Wesden for so many years. Let us look in upon them after three years' absence, and to the best of our ability note the alteration there.

Mr. and Mrs. Wesden are seated one on each

side of the fire: Mr. Wesden in a new arm-chair, bought of an upholsterer in the Borough, an easy and capacious chair, with spring seats and sides, and altogether a luxury for that establishment. Mrs. Wesden has become very feeble and rickety; rheumatic fever, that last year's hard trial, in which she was given over, and the quiet man collapsed into a nervous child for the nonce, has left its traces, and robbed her of much energy and strength. She is a very old woman at sixty-three, gray-haired and sallow, with two eyes that look at you in an amiable, deer-like fashion, in a motherly way that gives you an idea of what a kind woman and a good Christian she is.

Mr. Wesden, sitting opposite his worn better-half, was originally constructed from much tougher material. The lines are deeper in his face, the nose is larger, the eyes more sunken, perhaps the lips more thin, but there is business energy in him yet; no opportunity to earn money is let slip, and if it were not for constant twinges in his back he would be as agile as in the old days when there were doubts of getting on in life.

But who is this sitting with them like one of the family? a dark-haired, pale-faced girl of sixteen, short of stature, neat of figure, certainly not pretty, decidedly not plain, with an everyday face, that might be passed fifty times without attracting an observer; and then on the fifty-first startle him by its intense expression. A face older than its possessor's years; at times a grave face, more often, despite its pallor, a bright one, lit up with the cheerful thoughts which a mind at ease naturally gives to it.

Neatly, if humbly dressed, working with a rapidity and regularity that would have done credit to a stitching machine; evidently at home there in that back-parlor, to which her dark wistful eyes had been so often directed in the old days: this is the Mattie of our prologue—the stray, diverted from the dark course it was taking by the hand of John Wesden.

"Wesden, what's the time now?"

"My dear, it's not five minutes since you asked last," is the mild reproof of the husband, as he tugs at his copper-gilt watch-chain for a while; "it's close on ten o'clock."

"I hope nothing has happened to the train—"

"What should happen, Mrs. Wesden?" says a brisk, clear ringing voice; "just to-night of all nights, when Miss Harriet is expected. Why, she didn't give us hope of seeing her till nine; and trains are always behindhand, I've heard—and it's very early hours to get fidgety, isn't it, Sir?"

"Much too early."

"I haven't seen my dear girl for twelve months," half moans the mother; "she'll come back quite a lady; she'll come back for good, Wesden, and be our pride and joy forever. Never apart from us again."

"No, all to ourselves we shall have her after this. Well," with a strange half sigh, "we've done our duty by her, Mrs. W."

"I hope so."

"It's cost a heap of money; I don't regret a penny of it."

"Why should you, Wesden, when it's made our girl a lady, fit for any station in the world?"

"But this perhaps," says Mr. Wesden, thoughtfully; "and this can't matter, now we—"

He does not finish the sentence, but takes his pipe down from the mantle-piece, and proceeds to fill it in a mechanical fashion. Mrs. Wesden looks at him quietly; her lord and husband never smokes before supper, without his mind is disturbed: the action reminds his wife that the supper-hour is drawing near, and that nothing is prepared for Harriet's arrival.

"She will come home tired and hungry—oh dear me!—and nothing ready, perhaps."

"I'll help Ann directly," says Mattie.

The needle that has been plying all the time, that did not cease when Mattie attempted consolation, is stuck in the dress she is hemming; the work is rolled rapidly into a bundle; the light figure flits about the room, clears the table, darts down stairs into the kitchen; presently appears with Ann Packet, maid-of-all-work, lays the cloth, sets knives and forks and plates; varies proceedings by attending to customers in the shop—Mattie's task more often, now Mr. Wesden's back has lost its flexibility—flits back again to the task of preparing supper in the parlor.

With her work less upon her mind Mattie launches into small talk, her tongue rattles along with a rapidity only equal to her needle. She is in high spirits to-night, and talks more than usual, or else that loquacity for which a Mrs. Watts rebuked her once has known no diminution with expanding years.

"We shall have her in a few more minutes, mistress," she says, addressing the feeble old woman in the chair; "just as if she'd never been away from us—bless her pretty face!—and it was twelve days, rather than twelve months, since we all said good-by to her. She left you on a sick bed, Mrs. Wesden, and she comes back to find you well and strong again—to find home just as it should be, every thing going on well, and every body—oh, so happy!"

"And to find you, Mattie—what?" asks Mr. Wesden, in his quiet way.

"To find me very happy, too—happy in having improved in my scholarship, such as it is, Sir—happy with you two friends, to whom I owe—oh! more than I ever can think about, or be grateful enough for," she adds, with an impetuosity that leads her to rush at the quiet man and kiss him on the forehead.

"We're square, Mattie—we're perfectly square now," he replies, settling his silver-rimmed spectacles more securely on his nose.

"Oh! that is very likely," is the sharp response.

"You nursed the old lady like a daughter; you saved her somehow. If it hadn't been for you—"

"She would have been well weeks before; only I was such a restless girl, and wouldn't let her be quiet," laughs Mattie.

She passes into the shop again with the same elastic tread, serves out two ounces of tobacco,

detects a bad shilling, and focuses the customer with her dark eyes, appears but little impressed by his apologies, and more interested in her change, locks the till, and is once more in the parlor, talking about Miss Harriet again.

"She is on her way now," she remarks; "at London Bridge by this time, and Master Hinchford—we must say Mr. Hinchford now, I suppose—helping her into the cab he's been kind enough to get for her."

"What's the time now, Wesden?" asks the mother.

"Well," after the usual efforts to disinter, or disembowel, the silver watch, "it's certainly just ten."

"And by the time Tom's put the shutters up she'll be here!" cries Mattie. "See if my words don't come true, Mr. Wesden."

"Well, I hope they will. If they don't, I—I think I'll just put on my hat and walk down to the station."

Presently somebody coming down stairs with a heavy, regular tread, pausing at the side door in the parlor, and giving two decisive raps with his knuckles on the panels.

"Come in."

Enter Mr. Hinchford, senior, with his white hair rubbed the wrong way, and his florid face looking somewhat anxious.

"Haven't they come yet?"

"Not yet, Sir."

"Ah! I suppose not," catching Mattie's glance directed toward him across the needle-work which she has resumed again, and at which she is working harder than ever; "there's boxes to find and pack on the cab, and Miss Harriet's no woman if she do not remember at the last minute something left behind in the carriage."

"Won't you sit down, Sir?" asks Mrs. Wesden.

"N—no, thank you," he replies; "you'll have your girl home in a minute, and we mustn't overcrowd the little parlor. I shall give up my old habit of smoking here, now the daughter comes back; you must step up into my quarters, Wesden, a little more often."

"Thank you."

"Temporary quarters, I suppose, we must say, now the boy's getting on so well. Thank God," with a burst of affection, "that I shall see that boy in a good position of life before I die."

"He's a clever lad."

"Clever, Sir!" ejaculates the father; "he's more than clever, though I don't sing his praises before his face. He has as clear a head-piece as any man of forty, and he's as good a man of business."

"And so steady," adds Mrs. Wesden.

"God bless you, madam! yes."

"And so saying," is the further addition of Mr. Wesden; "that's a good sign."

"Ah! he knows the value of money better than his father did at his age," says the old man. "With his caution, energy, and cleverness we shall see him, if we live, a great man. Whoever lives to see him—a great man!"

"It's a comfort when our children grow up blessings to us," remarks Mrs. Wesden, dreamily looking at the fire; "neither you nor I, Sir, have any cause to be sorry for those we love so very, very much."

"No, certainly not. We're lucky people in our latter days. Good-night!"

"You can't stop, then?" asked Wesden.

"Not just now. Don't keep the boy down here, please; he'll stand and talk, forgetting that he's in the way to-night, unless you give him a hint to the contrary. Out of business he's a trifle inconsiderate, unless you plainly tell him he's not wanted. Good-night! I shall see Harriet in the morning."

"Yes; good-night!"

Mr. Hinchford retires again, and in a few minutes afterward, before there is further time to dilate upon the danger of railway traveling and the uncertainty of human hopes, the long-expected cab dashes up to the door. There is a bustle in Great Suffolk Street; the cabman brings in the boxes amidst a little knot of loungers, who have evidently never seen a box before, or a cab, or a young lady emerge therefrom assisted by a tall young man, or listened to an animated dispute about a cab-fare, which comes in by way of sequence while the young lady is kissing every body in turn in the parlor.

"My fare's eighteen-pence, guv'nor."

"Not one shilling legally," affirmed the young man.

"I never did it for a shilling afore—I ain't a going now—I'll take a summons out first."

"Take it."

"You won't stand another six-pence, guv'nor?"

"No."

"Then," bundling on to his box, and lashing his horse ferociously, "I won't waste my time on a tailor; it's much too valuable for that."

The young man laughs at this withering sarcasm, and passes through the shop into the parlor, where the animation has scarcely found time to subside.

Harriet Wesden is holding Mattie at arm's-length, and looking steadily at her; the stationer's daughter is taller by a head than the stray.

"And you, Mattie, have been improving, I see; learning all the lessons that I set you before I went away; becoming of help to father and mother, and thinking of poor me sometimes."

"Ah! very often of 'poor me.'"

"Oh! how tired I am! how glad I shall be to find myself in my room! Now, Mr. Sidney, I'm going to bid you good-night at once, thanking you for all past services."

"Very well, Miss Harriet."

"And, goodness me!—I did not notice those things before! What! spectacles, Sidney, at your age?"

The tall young man colors and laughs, keeping his position at the door-post all the while.

"Can't afford to have weak eyes yet, and so have sacrificed all my personal charms for the sake of convenience in matters of business. You don't mean to say that they look so very bad, though?"

"You look nearer ninety than nineteen," she replies. "Oh! I wouldn't take to spectacles for ever so much!"

"That's a very different affair," remarks Sidney.

"Why?"

"Oh! because it is—that's all. Well, I think I'll say good-night now. Shall I take that box up stairs for you, Miss Harriet?"

"Ann and I can manage it, Mr. Hinchford," says Mattie.

"Yes, and put a rib out, or something. Can't allow the gender sex to be black slaves during my sojourn in Great Suffolk Street. Good-night all."

"Good-night."

He closes the shop door, seizes the box which has been deposited in the shop, swings it round on his shoulders, and marches up stairs with it two steps at a time, and whistling the while. On the landing, outside the sitting-room and double-bedded room, which his father occupies, Ann Packet, domestic servant, meets him with a light.

"Lor a mussy on us! Is that you, Master Sidney?"

"Go a-head, up stairs, wench, and let us find a place to put the box down. This is Miss Harriet's box."

"Orful heavy, ain't it, Sir?"

"Well, it's not so light as it might be," asserts Master Sidney; "forward, there."

Meanwhile, too tired to repair to her room for any toilet arrangements at that hour of the night, Harriet Wesden sits down between her mother and father, holding her bonnet on her lap. Mr. and Mrs. Wesden regard her proudly, as well they may, Harriet being a girl to be proud of—tall, graceful, and pretty, something that makes home bright to the parents, and has been long missed by them. No one is aware of all that they have sacrificed in their desire to make a lady of their only child, or of one-half of the hopes which they have built upon concerning her.

"This always seems such an odd little box to come back to after the great Brighton school," she says, wearily; "oh dear, how tired I am!"

"Get your supper, my dear, at once, and don't sit up for any body to-night," suggests the mother.

"I don't want any supper. I—I think I'll go up stairs at once, and keep all my little anecdotes of school and schooling till the morrow. Shall I?"

"By all means, Harriet, if you're tired," says the father, "but after a long journey I would take something. You don't feel poorly, my dear?"

"Who? I? Oh no!" she answered, startled at the suggestion; "but I have been eating biscuits and other messes all the journey up to London, and therefore my appetite is spoiled for the night. To-morrow I shall be myself again, and we will have a long talk about all that has happened since I left here last year; by to-morrow we shall have settled down so comfortably."

"I hope so."

She looks timidly toward her father, but he is smoking his pipe, and placidly surveying her. She kisses him, then her mother, lastly Mattie, and leaves the room; the instant afterward Mattie remembers the unwieldy box which Master or Mr. Hinchford has carried up stairs.

"She'll never uncord the box. I should like to help her, if you can spare me."

"Knots always did try the dear girl," affirms Mrs. Wesden; "go and help her by all means, my dear."

Mattie needs no second bidding. She darts from the room, and in a few minutes is at the top of the house; in her forgetfulness inside the room without so much as a "By your leave, Miss Wesden."

"Oh dear! I forgot to knock; and oh dear, dear!" rushing forward to Harriet sitting by the bedside and rocking herself to and fro as though in pain, "what is the matter? can I help you? what has happened?"

CHAPTER II.

A GIRL'S ROMANCE.

MISS WESDEN continued to rock herself to and fro and moan at frequent intervals, after Mattie had intruded so unceremoniously upon her sorrows. She reached the hysterical stage, and there was no stopping the tears and the little windy sobs by which they were varied, and Harriet Wesden in tears, the girl whom Mattie had revered so long, was too much for our small heroine.

"Oh dear! what has happened? Shall I run and tell your father and mother?"

"Oh! for goodness' sake don't think of any thing of the kind!" cried the startled Harriet; "I—I—I shall be better in a minute. It's only a spasm or something; it's nothing that any one—can—help me—with."

"I know what it is," remarked Mattie, after a moment's reflection.

"You—you do, Mattie?"

"It's the wind," was the matter-of-fact reply; "you've been eating a heap of nasty buns, and then come up here without your supper, and it's brought on spasms, as you say."

"How ridiculous you are, child!" said this woman of seventeen, parting her fair hair back from her face, and making an effort to subdue her agitation. "Don't you see that I am very, very miserable?"

"In earnest?"

"Are people ever really, truly miserable in fun, Mattie?" was the sharp rejoinder.

"Not truly miserable, I should fancy. But you—oh! Miss Harriet, you miserable at your age?"

"Yes, it's a fact."

"Perhaps you have been robbed," suggested the curious Mattie; "I know that they used to send them out from Kent Street to hang about the railway stations. Never mind, Miss Harriet, I have been earning money, lately; and if you don't want your father to know how careless you have been—"

"Always unselfish, always thinking of doing some absurd action that shall benefit any one of the name of Wesden. No, no, Mattie, it's not money, it's not that—that vulgar complaint you mentioned just now. Oh! to have one friend in the world in whom I could trust—in whom I could confide my misery!"

"And haven't you one?" was the soft answer.

Harriet looked up at the wistful face, so full of love and pity.

"Ah! there's you, you mean. But you are a child still, and would never understand me. You would never have sympathy with all that I have suffered, or keep my secret if you had."

"What I could understand I can not say—I'm still hard at work in overtime at my lessons—but you may be sure of my sympathy, and of my silence. It's not that I'm so curious, Miss Harriet, but that I hope, when I know all, to be a comfort to you."

Harriet shook her head despondently, and beat her tiny foot impatiently upon the carpet. Any one in the world to be a comfort to her was a foolish idea that only irritated her to al-lude to.

"I'm living here to be a comfort to you all," said Mattie, in a low voice; "I've set myself to be that if ever I can. Every one in this house helped in a way to take me from the streets; every one has been more kind to me than I deserved—helped me on—given me good advice—done so much for me! I—I have often thought that perhaps my time might come some day to your family or the Hinchfords; but if to you, my darling, whom I love before the whole of them—who has been more than kind—whom I loved when I was a little ragged girl in the dark streets outside—how happy I shall be!"

"Happy to see me miserable, Mattie—that's what *that* amounts to."

"I didn't mean that," answered Mattie, half-aggrieved.

"No, I'm sure you did not," was the reply. "Lock the door, my dear, and let me take you into my confidence. I do want some one to talk to about it terribly."

Mattie locked the door, and, full of wonder, sat down by Harriet Wesden's side. The stationer's daughter had always treated Mattie as a companion rather than as a servant; she had but seen her in her holidays of late years; her father had trusted Mattie and made a shop-woman of her; she had found Mattie constituted after a while one of the family. Mattie was only a year her junior, and Mattie's love, almost her idolatry for her, had won upon a nature which, though far from faultless, was at least susceptible to kindness, ever touched by affection, and ever ready to return both.

"You must know, Mattie, then—and pray never breathe a syllable of this to mortal soul again—that I'm in love."

"*Lor*!" gasped Mattie.

"Dreadfully and desperately in love."

"Oh! hasn't it come early? and oh! *ain't* I dreadfully sorry?"

"Hush, Mattie, not so loud. They'll be coming up to bed in the next room presently, and if they were to find it out, I should die."

"They wouldn't mind, after they had once got used to it," said Mattie; "and if it has really come to love in earnest—there's a good deal of sham love I've been told—why, I don't think there's any thing to cry about. I should dance for joy myself."

"You're too young to know what you're talking about, Mattie," reproved Harriet.

"No, I'm not," was the quick answer; "I should feel very happy to know that there was some one to love me better than any body in the world; to think of me first, pray about me before he went to bed at night, dream of me till the daytime, keep me always in his head. Why shouldn't I be happy to know this—I who never remember what love was from any body?"

"Yes, yes, I understand you, Mattie," said Harriet; "that's part of love, not all."

"What else is there?"

Mattie was evidently extremely curious concerning all phases of "the heart complaint."

"It's too complicated, Mattie; when you're a woman you'll be able to find out for yourself."

It's better not to trouble your head about it yet a while."

"I wish you hadn't, Miss Harriet. It's not the likes of me that is going to think about it; and if you had left it till you were really a woman—I don't know much about the matter yet, but I'm thinking it would be all the better for you, too, my dear."

"It came all of a rush like—I wasn't thinking of it. There were two young men at first, who used to watch our school, and laugh at the biggest of us, and kiss their hands, just as young men *will* do, Mattie."

"Like their impudence, I think."

Mattie's matter-of-fact views were coming up-
permost again. She had seen much of the world in her youth, experienced much hardship, worked hard for a living, and there was no romance in her disposition—only affection, which had developed of late years, thanks to her new training.

"But there's always a little fun among the big girls, Mattie."

"What is the governess about?"

"She's looking out—but, bless you, she may look!"

"Ah! I suppose so. Well?"

"And then one young man went away, and only one was left—the handsomer of the two—and he fell in love *with me!*"

"Really and truly?"

"Why of course he did. Is it so wonderful?" and the boarding-school girl looked steadily at her companion.

Mattie looked at her. She *was* a beautiful girl, and perhaps it was not so wonderful after all. But then Mattie still looked at Harriet Wesden as a child—even as a child younger than she whom the world had aged very early—rendered "old-fashioned," as the phrase runs, in many things.

"Not wonderful, perhaps; but wasn't it wrong?" asked Mattie.

"I don't think so; I never thought of that; he was very fond of me, and used to send me letters by the servant, and I—I did get very fond of him. He was a gentleman's son, and oh! so handsome, Mattie, and so tall, and so clever!"

"About your age, I suppose?"

"No, four-and-twenty, or more, perhaps. I don't know."

"Well? Oh dear! how *did* it end?" asked Mattie. "It's like the story-books in the shop, isn't it?"

"Wait a while, dear. The misery of the human heart is to be unfolded now. He's a gentleman's son; and there's an estate or something in West India or East India, or in some dreadful hot place over the water somewhere, where the natives hook themselves in the small of their backs, and swing about and say their prayers."

"How nasty!"

"And—and he—was to go there," her sobs beginning again at the reminiscence, "and live there, and" dropping her voice to a whisper, "he asked me if I'd run away with him, and be married to him over there."

Mattie clenched her fist spasmodically. She saw through the flimsy veil of romance with a suddenness for which she was unprepared herself. She was a woman of the world, with a knowledge of the evil in it, on the instant.

"Oh! that man was a big scamp! I'm sure of it; I know it!"

"What makes you think that?" asked Harriet, imperiously.

"Couldn't he have come to Suffolk Street and told your father all about it, like a—like a man?"

"Yes, but *his* father—his father is a gentleman, and would never let him marry a poor, deplorable stationer's daughter."

"Ah! his father does not know you; and his father didn't have the chance of trying, I'm inclined to think," was the shrewd comment here.

"Never mind that," said Harriet; "I don't see that that's any thing to do with the matter just now. I wouldn't run away. I was very frightened; I loved father and mother, and I knew how they loved me. And when I cried he said he had only done it to try me; and then—and then—he went away next day forever!"

"And a good riddance," muttered Mattie.

"Oh, Mattie! you cruel, *cruel* girl! Is this the sympathy you talked about a little while ago?"

"I've every sympathy with you, my own dear young lady," said Mattie; "I'm sorry to see how this is troubling you—you so young!—just now. But I don't think *he* acted very properly, Miss Harriet, or that you were quite so careful of yourself as—you might have been."

"I'm a wretched, wretched woman!"

"Does he know where you live?"

"Ye—es," she sobbed.

"And where did he live before he went to India?"

"Surrey."

"That's a large place, I think. I haven't turned to geography lately, but I fancy it's a double map. If that's all the address it's a good big one. May I ask his name?"

"Never," was the melodramatic answer.

"Ah! it does not matter much. I hope, for the sake of all down stairs, you will try and forget it. It's no credit; you were much too young and he too old in every thing. Oh! Miss Harriet, you and the other young ladies must have been going it down at Brighton."

"It all happened suddenly, Mattie. I'm not a forward girl. They're all of my age—oh! and ever so much bolder."

"A very nice school that must be, I should think," said Mattie, leaving the bed for the box, which she proceeded to uncurl. "If I ever hear of any body wanting to send their daughters to a finishing akkademy"—Mattie was not thoroughly up in pure English yet—"I'll just recommend that one."

"Mattie," reproved Harriet, "you've got at all that you wanted to know, and now you're full of bitter sarcasm."

"I'm full of bitter nothing, miss," was the reply. "And oh! you don't know how sorry I feel that it has all happened, making you so old and womanly before your time, filling your head with rubbish about the chaps!"

Harriet said nothing. She sat and watched with dreamy eyes the process of uncurling; only, when Mattie attempted to turn the box on its side, did she spring up and help to assist without a word.

"There, that'll do," she said, peevishly. "Let me only unlock the box and get at my night-

things—that's all I want. Mattie, for goodness' sake, don't keep so in the way!"

Mattie stood aside, and Harriet Wesden, with an impatient hand, unlocked the box and raised the heavy oaken lid. Mattie's eyes, sharp as needles, detected a small roll of written papers, neatly tied.

"Are these the letters, Miss Harriet?"

"Good gracious me, how curious and prying you are!" said Harriet, snatching the packet from her hand. "I wish I had never told you a syllable: I wish you'd leave my things alone!"

"I beg your pardon; I only asked. It *was* wrong."

"Well, there, I forgive you; but you are so tiresome and old-fashioned! I can't make you out; I never shall; you're not like other girls."

"Was I brought up like other girls, you know?" was the sad question.

"No, no; I forgot that. I beg your pardon, Mattie; I didn't mean it for a taunt."

"God bless you, I know that. What are you doing?"

"Getting rid of these," thrusting the letters in the candle-flame as she spoke. "I can trust you, but not them, Mattie."

"I'd hold them over the fire-place, then. If they drop on the toilet-table we shall have the house afire."

Harriet took the advice proffered, and removed her combustibles to the place recommended. Mattie, on her knees by the box, watched the process.

"And there's an end of *them*," Harriet said at last, in a decisive tone.

"And of him—say of him?"

"We parted forever; but I shall always think of him—think, too, that perhaps I *was* very young and thoughtless and vain, to lead him on, or to be led on. But oh! Mattie, he did love me; he wouldn't have harmed me for the world!"

"He hasn't spoken of writing; you haven't promised to write any more?"

"No; it was a parting forever. Haven't I said so, over and over again?"

"Then you'll soon forget him, Miss Harriet. Try and forget him, for your own sake; you can't tell whether he wasn't making game of you, for certain; he didn't act well, for he wasn't a boy, was he? And now go to sleep, and wake up in the morning your old self, Miss."

"I'll try; I must try!"

"I don't think that this fine gentleman will ever turn up again; if he does, you'll be older to take your own part. Oh dear! how contrary things do go, to be sure!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I did think I knew whom you were to marry."

"Who was it?" said Harriet, with evident interest in her question.

"Well, I thought, Miss Harriet, that you'd grow up, and grow up to be a young woman, and that Master Sidney underneath would grow up, and grow up to be a young man, and you'd fall naturally in love with one another, marry, and be—oh! so happy. When I'm hard at work at the lessons he or his father writes out for me sometimes, I catch myself forgetting all about them, and thinking of you and him together; and I your servant, perhaps, or little housekeeper. I've always thought that that would come to

pass some day, and that he'd grow rich and make a lady of you; and it made me happy to think that the two who'd been perhaps the kindest in all the world to me would marry some fine day. I've pictured it—pictured it," she corrected, "many and many a time, until I fancied at last it must come true."

"Master Sidney, indeed!" was the disparaging comment.

"When you know him you won't talk like that," said Mattie; "he's a gentleman—growing like one fast; and I don't think, young as he is, that he would have acted like that other one you've been silly enough to think about."

"Silly! Oh Mattie, Mattie, that isn't sympathy with me! I don't know whether you're a child or an old woman; you talk like both of them, and in one breath. Why did I tell you! why did I tell you!"

"Because I was in earnest, and begged hard; because I was afraid, and you could not keep such a secret from me as that; and if you had wanted help—how I would have stood by you!"

Harriet noted the kindling eyes, and her heart warmed to the non-descript.

"Thank you, Mattie; one friend at least now."

"Always: don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do."

Mattie was at the door when Harriet called her back.

"Mattie, never a word about this again. I dare say I shall soon forget it, for I am very young; and though it was LOVE, yet I won't let it break my heart. I'm very wretched now. I shall be glad," she added, with a yawn, "to lie down and think of all my sorrows."

"And sleep them away?"

"Oh! I shall not close an eye to-night. Good-night, Mattie."

Miss Harriet Wesden, a young lady who had begun life early, was sleeping soundly three minutes after Mattie's departure from the room.

CHAPTER III.

OUR CHARACTERS.

In our last chapter we have implied that life began early for Harriet Wesden. Before her school-days were finished, and with that precocity for which school-girls of the present era are unhappily distinguished, she was thinking of her lover, and constituting herself the heroine of a little romance, all the more dangerous for being unreal and out of the common track. A tender-hearted girl, with a head not the most strong in the world, is easily impressed by the sentiment, real or assumed, of the first good-looking young fellow whom she may meet. In her own opinion she is not too young to receive admiration, and the consciousness of having impressed one of the opposite sex, arouses her vanity, changes the current of her thoughts, makes the world for a while a very different place; bright, ethereal, and unreal. All this very dangerous ground to tread, but the more delightful for its pitfalls; all this a something that has occurred in a greater or less degree to most of us in our time, though we have the good sense to say nothing about it, or to laugh at the follies and the

troubles we rashly sought in our nonage. Boys and girls begin their courtships early in these latter days; there is not a girl of sixteen who does not consider herself fit to love and be loved, however demure she may appear, or however much she may be kept back by detestable short frocks and frilled indescribables. And as for our boys, why, they are men of the world immediately they leave school; men of a world that is growing more rapid in its revolutions, and hardens its inhabitants wonderfully fast. It is a singular fact in the history of shop-keeping, that children's toys are becoming unfashionable "Bless you, Sir, children don't buy toys now; they're much too old for those amusements!" was the assertion of one of the trade to the writer of this work. And how many little misses and masters can most of us call to mind who are growing pale over their fancy work, their books, and their "collections;" children who will do any thing but play, and have souls above "Noah's Arks!"

Therefore, in these precocious times, Harriet Wesden, seventeen next month, was no exceptional creature; moreover, she had been to a boarding-school, where she had met with many of her own age who were twice as womanly and worldly—big girls, who were always talking about "the chaps," as Mattie had inolegantly phrased it.

There is no occasion in this place to retrace the school-career of Harriet Wesden to see how much she has kept back or extenuated; her story to Mattie was a truthful one, told with no drawbacks, but with a half-pride in her achievements, which her girlish sorrows were not capable of concealing. There was something satisfactory in having loved, and having been loved; and though the love had vanished away, still the reminiscence was not wholly painful, however much she might fancy so at that period.

Mattie had listened to her story, and offered all the consolation in her power; Mattie was a girl of hard, plain facts, and looked more soberly at the world than her contemporaries. She had a dark knowledge of the worst part of it, and her early years had aged her more than she was aware of herself—aged her thoughts rather than her heart, for she was always cheerful, and her spirits were never depressed; she went her way in life quietly and earnestly, grateful for the great change by which that life had been characterized; grateful to all who had helped to turn it in a different channel. At this period Mattie was happy. There was nothing to trouble her; it was an important post to hold in that stationer's shop; every body had confidence in her, and had given her kind words; she had learned to know right from wrong; they were interested in her moral progress, both the shop-keeper and the lodgers on the first-floor; she was more than content with her position in society—she was thankful for it.

The Hinchfords had maintained their interest in Mattie from the day of her attempt to explain her long search for the brooch. The father, a student of human nature, as he termed himself, had persuaded her to attend evening school, to study to improve in reading and writing at home; and Master Hinchford, who wrote a capital hand, set her copies in his leisure, and gave his verdict on her calligraphic performances.

Mattie snatched at the elements of her education in a fugitive manner; Mr. Wesden did not object to her progress, but she was his servant, afterward his shopwoman, and he wanted his money's worth out of her, like a man who understood business in all its branches. Mattie never neglected work for her studies, and yet made rapid advancement; and, by-and-by, Mr. Hinchford, during one of his quiet interviews with the stationer, had obtained for her more time to attend her evening classes—and hence the improvement which we have seen in Mattie. So time had gone on, till Miss Wesden's return for good; so far, then, had the stationer's daughter and the stray made progress.

Mattie, with a judgment beyond her years, had perceived the evanescent nature of Harriet Wesden's romance, and prophesied concerning it. She did not believe in the depth or intensity of Harriet's sorrow; moreover, she knew Harriet was not of a fretful disposition, and that new faces and new pursuits would exercise their usual effect upon a nature impressionable, and—just a little weak. Mattie was a judge of character without being aware of it, and her own unimpressionability set her above her fellows, and gave her a clear insight into events that were passing around her. A girl of observation also, who let few things—serious or trivial—escape her, but glanced at them in their revolutions, and remembered them, if necessary. This acuteness had possibly been derived from her hand-to-mouth existence in the old days; in her time of affluence, the habit of storing up and taking mental notes of every thing, had not deserted her. Take her altogether, she was a sharp girl, and suited Mr. Wesden's business admirably.

Quietly Mattie set herself to take stock of Harriet Wesden, after the latter's confession, to note if the love to which she had confessed were likely to be a permanency or not. Harriet and Mattie spoke but little concerning the adventures at Brighton; Mattie shunned the subject, and turned the conversation when Harriet felt prone to dilate upon her melancholy sensations. Besides, Mattie knew her place, kept to the shop, whither Harriet seldom followed her—that young lady having a soul above the business, by which she had benefited. Mr. and Mrs. Wesden rather admired this; they had saved money, and the business, to the latter at least, was but a secondary consideration; they had paid a large sum to make a lady of Harriet, and when they retired from business Harriet would go with them, and be their hope and comfort, with her lady-like ways, in their little suburban residence. They were not slow in letting Harriet know this; they spoke of a private life very frequently; when Harriet was two years older they would retire and live happily ever afterward! Or, Mr. Wesden thought more prudently, if they did not give up the business for good, still they would live away from it, and leave the management of it to some trust-worthy personage—Mattie, for instance, who would see after their interests, while they took their ease in their old age.

Mr. Hinchford, senior, had listened to these flying remarks more than once. He spoke of his own establishment in the future in his turn: where and how he should live with that clever boy of his, who would redeem the family credit by assuming the Hinchfords' legitimate position.

"I kept my carriage once, Mr. Wesden; I hope to do it again. My boy's very clever, very energetic; he has gained the esteem of his employers, and I believe that they will make a partner of him some day."

What Sidney Hinchford believed did not appear upon the surface. He was a youth—say a young man—who kept a great many thoughts to himself, and pushed on in life steadily and undemonstratively. His father was right; Sidney had gained the esteem of his employers; he was very clever at figures, handy as a correspondent, never objected to overwork, did more work than any one of the old hands; evinced an aptitude for business and an interest in his employers' success very remarkable in these egotistical times. His employers were wholesale tea-dealers in Mincing Lane; well-to-do men, without families of their own; men who had risen from the ranks, after the fashion of City men, who have a nice habit of getting on in the world. Sidney Hinchford's manner pleased them; but they kept their own counsel and watched his progress, and Sidney's was a remarkable progress for a youth of his age.

Sidney, be it said here, was an ambitious youth in his heart. His father had been a rich man; his father's family, from which they held themselves aloof, were rich people, and his hope was in recovering the ground which, by some means or other never satisfactorily explained to him, the Suffolk Street lodgers had managed to lose. Young men brought up in City counting-houses have a wonderful reverence for money; Sidney saw its value early in life, and became just a trifle too careful; for overcarefulness makes a man suspicious, and keeps the heart from properly expanding with love and charity to those who need it. An earnest and an honorable young man, as we hope to prove without labeling our character at the outset, yet he stood too much upon what was legal, what was a fair price or a good bargain; and pushed his way onward without much thought for the condition of beings less lucky than he. There was a prize ahead of him; he could see it above the crowd which jostled him for bread, for fame, for other prizes worth the winning, and by which he set no store; and he kept his eyes upon it steadfastly and dreamed of it in his sleep. He became grave-faced and stern before his time; he was a man at nineteen, with a man's thoughts and doing a man's work.

And then a something came to soften him and turn his thoughts a little aside from the beaten track, and this is how it came about.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW ADMIRER.

MASTER SIDNEY HINCHFORD in old times had been a play-fellow of Harriet Wesden; lodging in the same house together, returning from school at the same hours, they had become almost brother and sister, entertaining for each other that child's affection which it was but natural to expect would have been developed under the circumstances.

Mr. Hinchford, a widower, with no great ability in the management of children, was glad to see his boy find an attraction in the stationer's

parlor, and leave him to the study of his books or the perusal of his newspapers, after the long office-hours. He was a thoughtful man, too, who considered it best for his son to form a friendship with one of his own age; and he had become attached to the Wesdens, as people who had been kind to him and his boy in a great trouble. And it was satisfactory to pair off Harriet Wesden—who was in the way of business, and generally considered at that period a tiresome child, seldom of one mind longer than five minutes together—with Master Hinchford, and so keep her out of mischief and out of the shop where the draughts were many and likely to affect her health. This good understanding had never diminished between Harriet Wesden and Sidney Hinchford; only the boarding-school at last had set them apart. When they met once a year, they were still the same warm friends, and it was like a brother meeting a sister when the Christmas holidays came round. The last holiday but one, when Harriet, who had grown rapidly, returned from Brighton, a girl close upon sixteen years of age, there was a little shyness at first between them, which wore off in a few days. Sidney met her after a year's absence without kissing her, stared and stammered, and found it hard to assume a natural demeanor, and it was only Harriet's frank and girlish ways that eventually set him at his ease.

The present Christmas all was altered, very much for the worse, Sidney thought. He had met, for the first time, a pale-faced, languishing young lady—a lady who had become very beautiful certainly, but was not the Harriet Wesden whom he had hitherto known. He had escorted her from the Brighton station, thinking that she had altered very much, and that he did not like her new ways half so well as the old; he had seen her every evening after that return, noted the variableness of her moods, set her down, in his critical way, for an eccentric girl, whom it was impossible to understand.

If she were dull, he fancied he had offended her; if she were lively, he became thin-skinned enough to imagine that she was making fun of him. He did not like it, he thought; but he found the new Harriet intruding upon his business ideas, getting between him and the rows of figures in his ledger, perplexing him with the last look she gave him, and the last musical word that had rung in his ears. He did not believe that he was going to fall in love with her—not when he was really in love with her, and found his sensations a nuisance.

And Harriet Wesden, who had already succumbed to the love-god, and been enraptured by the dulcet notes of the stranger, she thought Sidney Hinchford had not improved for the better: that his glasses rendered him almost plain; that his dry hard voice grated on her ears; and that he had even grown quite a cross-looking young man. She took occasion to tell him these unpleasant impressions with a sisterly frankness to which he appeared to object; gave him advice as to deportment, set of his neckerchief, size of his gloves, and only became a little thoughtful when she noted the effect which her advice had upon him, and the lamb-like docility with which he obeyed all her directions. Finally, all her spirits came back. She had her doubts as to the state of Sidney Hinchford's heart, and whether

her first judgment on his personal appearance were correct in the main; she began to observe him more closely; life appeared to present an object in it once more; her vanity—for she was a girl who knew she was pretty, and was proud of the influence which her pretty face exercised—was flattered by his rapt attention; and though she should never love any body again—never, never in all her life!—yet it was pleasant to know that Sidney was thinking of her, and to see how a smile or a frown of hers brightened his looks or cast them back into shadow.

Harriet Wesden was partial to experimentalizing on the effect which her appearance might create on society. She was not a strong-minded girl, who despised appearances; on the contrary, as weak and as vain as that Miss Smith or Miss Brown whose demerits our wives discuss over their tea-tables. She was not strong-minded; she was pretty; and she was seventeen years of age!

If she went for a walk, or on a shopping excursion, she was particular about the bonnet she wore; and if young men, and old men too, some of them, looked admiringly at her pretty face as they passed her, she was flattered at the attention in her heart, although she kept steadily on her way, and looked not right or left in her progress. If the army of non-descripts in the great drapers' was thrown into a small flutter at her appearance therein, and white neckclothed servility struggled behind the boxes for the distinction of waiting on her, it was a gratification which she felt all the more for remaining so lady-like and unmoved on the high chair before the counter. She was a girl who knew her attractions, and was proud of them; but unfortunately she was a girl who knew but little else, and who thought but of little else just then. There was a pleasure in knowing that, let her step into any part of the London streets, people would notice her, even stop and look after her; and it did not strike her that there were other faces as pretty as hers who received the same amount of staring and gazing at, and met with the same little "romantic" incidents occasionally.

From her boarding-school days Harriet had been inclined to romance; the one foolish *escapade* had tinged life with romantic hues, and, pretty as she was, her opinion of her own good looks was considerably higher than any one else's. She passed through life from seventeen to eighteen years of age taking every thing as a compliment—flattered by the rude stares, the impertinent smiles from shallow-brained puppies who leer at every woman *en route*; rather pleased than otherwise if a greater idiot or a nastier beast than his contemporaries tracked her footsteps homeward, and lingered about Great Suffolk Street in the hope of seeing her again. All this the spell of her beauty which lured men toward her; all this without one thought of harm—simply an irresistible vanity that took delight in her influence, and was pleased with immoderate fooleries.

Pretty, vain, foolish, and fond of attention, on the one side; but good-tempered, good-hearted, and innocent of design on the other. A butterfly disposition that would carry its owner through life if the sun shone, but would be whirled Heaven knows where in a storm. She would have been happy all her life had all mankind been up

to the dead level of honest intentions, which it is not just at present, thanks to the poor wretches like us who get our living by story-telling!

Most young ladies constituted like Harriet Wesden have an ordeal to pass through for better for worse; if for worse, God help them! Harriet Wesden's came in due course.

It was, in the beginning, but another chapter of romance—another conquest! Love at first sight in London streets, and the fervor of a newborn passion carrying the devotee out of the track, and leading him to follow in her footsteps, worshipping at a distance. It had occurred twice before, and was a compliment to the power of her charms—her heart quite fluttered at these little breaks in a somewhat monotonous existence. It was rather aggravating that the romance always ended in an old-fashioned bookseller's shop in Great Suffolk Street, where "the mysterious strangers" were jostled into the mud by people with baskets, and then run down by bawling costers with barrows. That was not a nice end to the story, and though she wished the story to conclude at the door, yet she would have preferred something more graceful as a "wind-up." Nevertheless, take it for all in all, a satisfactory proof that she had a face pretty enough to lure people out of their way, and rob them of their time—lead them, without a "mite of encouragement" on her part, to follow her fairy footsteps. If there were hypocrisy in her complaints to Mattie concerning the "impudence" of the fellows, she scarcely knew it herself; and Mattie would not believe in hypocrisy in the girl whom she served with a Balderstonian fidelity. The third fugitive adorer of the stationer's daughter was of a different stamp to his predecessors. He was one of a class—a gentleman by birth and position, and a prowler by profession. A prowler in fine clothes of fashionable cut, hanging about fashionable thoroughfares when London was in town, and going down to fashionable watering-places when London needed salt-water. A man of the lynx order of bipeds, hunting for prey at all times and seasons, meeting with many rebuffs, and anon—and alas! with sufficient encouragement—attracted by every fresh, innocent face; seeking it out as his profession; following it with a pertinacity that would have been creditable in any other pursuit—in fact, a scamp of the first water!

Harriet Wesden had gone westward in search of a book ordered by a customer, and had met this man, when homeward-bound, in Regent Street. Harriet's face attracted him, and in a business-like manner, which told of long practice, he started in pursuit, regulating his conduct by the future manoeuvres of the object in view. Harriet fluttered on her way homeward, conscious, almost by intuition, that she was followed; proceeding steadily in a southeastern direction, and pertinaciously keeping the back of her straw-bonnet to the pursuer. Had she looked behind once, our prowler would have increased his pace, and essayed to open a conversation—a half smile, even a look of interest, the ghost of an *arriade* would have been sufficient test of character for him, and he would have chanced his fortunes by a *coup d'état*.

But he was in doubt. Once, in crossing the Strand toward Waterloo Bridge, he managed to veer round and confront her, but she never

glanced toward him; so, with a consideration not generally apparent in prowlers, he contented himself with following her home. He had his time on his hands—he had not met with an adventure lately—he was approaching a region that was not well known to him, and the smell of which disgusted him; but there was a something in Harriet Wesden's face which took him gingerly along, and he was a man who always followed his adventures to an end. Cool, calculating, and daring, he would have made an excellent soldier—being brought up as an idler, he turned out a capital scoundrel.

Harriet reached her own door, and gave a half timid, half inquiring glance round before she passed into the shop. Our prowler took stock of the name and the number—he had an admirable memory—examined every thing in the shop window; walked on the opposite side of the way; looked up at the first and second floor, and met with nothing to reward his vigilance but the fierce face of old Hinchford; finally entered the shop and purchased some cigars, grinding his teeth quietly to himself over Mr. Wesden's suspicions of his sovereign being a counterfeiter.

We should not have dwelt upon this incident had it thus ended, or had no effect upon our story's progress. But, on the contrary, from the man's persistency, strange results evolved.

Twice or thrice a week this tall, high-shouldered, mustached *roué* of five-and-thirty appeared in Suffolk Street—patronized the bookseller's shop by purchases—hulked about street corners, watching the house, and catching a glimpse of Harriet occasionally. This was the Brighton romance over again, only Harriet was a year older now, and the hero of the story was sawn-faced and sinister—there was danger to any modest girl in those little scintillating eyes of his; and that other hero had been much younger, and had really loved her, she believed!

Pertinacity appears like devotion to some minds, and our prowler had met with his reward more than once by keeping doggedly to his post; he held his ground, therefore, and watched his opportunity. Harriet Wesden had become frightened by this time; the adventure had lost its romantic side, and there was something in her new admirer's face which warned even her, a girl of no great penetration.

Mattie was always Harriet's *confidante* in these matters; Harriet was fond of asking advice how to proceed, although she did not always take the same with good grace. That little, black-eyed confidante kept watch in her turn upon the prowler, and resolved in her mind the best method of action.

"I'm afraid of him, Mattie," whispered Harriet; "I should not like father to know he had followed me home, lest he should think I had given the man encouragement, and father can be very stern when his suspicions are aroused. Besides, I shouldn't like Sidney to know."

"But he wouldn't believe that you had given him encouragement; he thinks too much of you, I fancy."

"You're full of fancies, Mattie."

"And—oh! there's the man again, looking under the *London Journals*. How very much like the devil in a French hat he is, to be sure!"

This dialogue occurred in the back parlor

while Mrs. Wesden was up stairs, and Mr. Wesden in Paternoster Row in search of the December "monthlies;" and in the middle of it the devil in his French hat stepped, with his usual cool imperturbability, into the shop.

This procedure always annoyed Mattie; she saw through the pretense, and, though it brought custom to the establishment, still it aggravated her. It was playing at shop, and "making-believe" to want something; and shop with our humble heroine was an important matter, and not to be lightly trifled with. She had her revenge in her way by selling the prowler the driest, hardest, and most undrawable of cigars, giving him the penny Pickwicks for the mild *Havanas*; she sold him fuses that she knew had been left in a damp place, and the outside periodicals, which had become torn and soiled; could she have discovered a bad six-pence in the till, I believe, in her peculiar ideas of retaliation, she would not have hesitated an instant in presenting it with his change.

The gentleman of energy entered the shop then, rolled his eyes over the parlor blind toward Harriet, who sat at fancy-work by the fireside, finally looked at Mattie, who stood stolidly surveying him. Now energy without a result had considerably damped the ardor of our prowler, and he had resolved to push a little forward in the sapping and mining way. He was a man who had made feminine pursuit a study; he knew human weakness, and the power of the money he carried in his pockets. He was well up in Ovid and in the old comedies of a dissolute age, where the Abigail is always tempted before the mistress; and Mattie was only a servant of a lower order, easily to be worked upon, he had not the slightest doubt. There was a servant who did the scrubbing of the stones before the door, and sat half out of window polishing the panes, till she curdled his blood, but she was a red-faced, stupid girl, and as there was a choice, he preferred that shop-girl, "with the artful black eyes," as he termed them.

"Good-morning, Miss."

"Good-morning."

"Have you any—any more of those exceedingly nice cigars, Miss?"

"Plenty more of them."

"I'll take a shilling's-worth."

Mattie, always anxious to get him out of the shop, rolled up his cigars in paper, and passed them rapidly across the counter. The prowler, not at all anxious, unrolled the paper, drew forth his cigar-case, and proceeded to place the "*Havanas*" very carefully one by one in their proper receptacles, talking about the weather and the business, and even complimenting Mattie upon her good looks that particular morning, till Mattie's blood began to simmer.

"You haven't paid me yet, Sir," she said, rather sharply.

"No, Miss—in one moment, if you will allow me."

After a while, during which Mattie moved from one foot to another in her impatience, he drew forth a sovereign and laid it on the counter.

"We're short of change, Sir—if you have any thing smaller—"

"Nothing smaller, I am compelled to say, Miss."

Mattie hesitated. Under other circumstan-

ces she would have left her shop, ran into the pork-butcher's next door, and procured change, after a hint to Harriet to look to the business; but she detected the ruse of the prowler, and was not to be outwitted. She opened her till again, and found fourteen shillings in silver—represented by a preponderance of three-penny pieces, but that was of no consequence, save that it took him longer to count; and from a lower drawer she drew forth one of many five-shilling packets of coppers, which pawnbrokers and publicans on Saturday nights were glad to give Mr. Wesden silver for, and laid it down with a heavy dab on the counter.

"What—what's that?" he ejaculated.

"That's ha'pence—that's all the change we've got—and I can't leave the shop," said Mattie, briskly. "You can give me my cigars back and get change for yourself, if you don't like it."

"Thank you," was the suave answer, "I was not thinking much about the change. If you will buy yourself a new bonnet with it, you will be conferring a favor upon me."

"And what favor will you want back?" asked Mattie, quickly.

"Oh! I will leave that to time and your kindness—come, will you take it and be friends with me? I want a friend in this quarter very much."

He pushed the silver and the cumbersome packet of coppers toward her. He was inclined to be liberal. He remembered how many he had dazzled in his time by his profuse munificence. Money he had never studied in his life, and by the strange rule of contraries, he had had plenty of it.

Mattie was impulsive—even passionate, and the effort to corrupt her allegiance to the Wesdens fired her blood to a degree that she even wondered at herself shortly afterward.

"Take yourself out of this shop, you bad man," she cried, "and your trumpery change too! Be off with you before I call a policeman or throw something at you—you great big coward, to be always coming here insulting us!"

With her impatient hands she swept the money off the counter, five-shilling packet of coppers and all, which fell with a crash, and disgorged its contents on the floor.

"What—what do you mean?" stammered the prowler.

"I mean that it's no good your coming here, and that nobody wants to see you here again, and that I'll set the policeman on you next time you give me any of your impudence. Get out with you, you coward!"

Mattie thought her one threat of a policeman sufficient; she had still a great reverence for that official personage, and believed that his very name must strike terror to guilty hearts. The effect upon her auditor led her to believe that she had been successful; but he was only alarmed at Mattie's loud voice, and the stoppage of two boys and a woman at the door.

"I—I don't know what you mean—you're mad," he muttered, and then slunk out of the shop, leaving his cumbersome change for a sovereign spread over the stationer's floor. Mattie went round the counter and collected the *débbris* of mammon, minus one three-penny piece which she could not discern any where, but which Mr. Wesden, toiling under his monthly parcel, detected in one corner immediately upon his entrance.

"Why, Mattie, what's this?—MONEY—on the floor!"

"A gentleman dropped his change, Sir."

"Put it on the shelf, he'll be back for it presently."

"No, I don't think he will," was Mattie's dry response.

CHAPTER V.

PERSEVERANCE.

MATTIE in her self-conceit imagined that she had frightened the prowler from Great Suffolk Street; in lieu thereof, she had only deterred him from entering a second appearance on the premises. He had made a false move, and reaped the bitter consequence. He must be more wary if he built upon making an impression on Harriet Wesden's heart—more cautious, more of a strategist. So he continued to prow at a distance, and to watch his opportunity from the same point of view. Presently it would come, and with the advantage of his winning tongue, which could roll off elegant phrases by the yard, he trusted to make an impression on a shop-keeper's daughter.

For a moment, and after his rebuff, he had hesitated as to the expediency of continuing the siege; but his pride was aroused; it was an unpleasant end to his plans, and the chance had not presented itself yet of trying his fortune with Miss Wesden herself. Presently the hour would come; he did not despair yet; he bided his time with great patience.

The time came a fortnight after that little incident in the Suffolk Street shop. Harriet Wesden was coming down the Borough toward home one wet night when he accosted her. It was getting late for one thing, and rainy for another, and Harriet was making all the haste home that she could, when he made her heart leap into her throat by his sudden "Good-evening, Miss!"

One glance at him, the nipping of a little scream in the bud, and then she increased her pace, the prowler keeping step with her.

"Will you favor me by accepting half my umbrella, Miss Wesden—for one instant then, while I venture to explain what may seem conduct the reverse of gentlemanly to you?"

"No, Sir, I wish to hear nothing—I wish to be left alone."

"I have been very rude—I will ask your pardon, Miss Wesden, very humbly. But let me beg of you to listen to this explanation of my conduct."

"There is nothing to explain, Sir."

"Pardon me, but there is. Pardon me, but this is not the way you would have treated Mr. Darcy had he been in my place."

Harriet gasped for breath. Mr. Darcy, the hero of her Brighton folly, the name which she had never confessed to a living soul, the only man in the world who she thought could have taunted her with indiscretion, and of being weak and frivolous rather than a rude and forward girl! Harriet did not reply; she looked at him closely, almost tremblingly, and then continued her hurried progress homeward; the prowler, seeing his advantage, maintained his position by her side, keeping the umbrella over her.

"Mr. Darcy was an intimate friend of mine before he went to India; we were together at Brighton, Miss Wesden—more than once he has mentioned your name to me."

"Indeed," she murmured.

"You would like to hear that he is well, perhaps."

"I am glad to hear that," Miss Wesden ventured to remark.

"He is in India still—I believe will remain there, marry and settle down there for good."

"Have you been watching my house to tell me this?"

"Partly, and partly for other reasons, for which I have a better excuse. I have been a wanderer—in search of happiness many years, and for the first time in a life not unadventurous there crosses my—"

"Good-evening, Sir; I have been entrapped into a conversation; I must beg you to leave me."

Harriet set off at the double again; in double quick time went the prowler after her.

People abroad that night began to notice the agitated girl, and the tall man marching on at her side, who, in his eagerness to keep step, trod on people's feet, and sent one doctor's boy, basket and bottles, crunching against a lamp-post; one or two stopped and looked after them and then continued their way; it was a race between the prowler and his victim, the prowler making a dead heat of it.

Harriet gave in at last; her spirit was not a very strong one, and she stopped and burst into tears.

"Sir, will you leave me? will you believe that I don't want to hear a single word of your reasons for thus persecuting me?"

"Miss Wesden, only allow me to explain, and I will go my way and never see you more. I will vanish away in the darkness, and let all the bright hopes I have fostered float away on the current which bears you away from me."

"Go, pray do go, if you are a gentleman. I must appeal to some one for protection, if you—"

"Miss Wesden, you must hear me—you shall hear me. I am not a child; I am—"

"A scoundrel, evidently," said a harsh voice in his ears, and the instant afterward Sidney Hinchford, with two fiery eyes behind his spectacles, stood between him and the girl he was persecuting. Harriet, with a little cry of joy, clung to the arm of her deliverer; the prowler looked perplexed, then put the best face upon the matter that he could extemporize for the occasion.

"Who are you, Sir?" was the truly English expletive.

"My name is Hinchford; my address is at your service, if you wish it. Now, Sir, your name—and business?"

"I decline to give it."

"You have insulted this lady, a friend of mine. Apologize!" cried young Hinchford, in much such a tone as an irritable officer summons his company to shoulder arms.

"Sir, your tone is not calculated to induce me to oblige you. If Miss Wesden thinks that I—"

"APOLOGIZE!" shouted Hinchford, a second time. He had forgotten the respect due to his charge, and shaken her hand from his arm; he

was making a little scene in the street, and convulsing Harriet with fright; he was face to face with the prowler, his tall, well-knit form, evidently a match for his antagonist; he was chivalrous, and scarcely twenty years of age; above all, he was in a towering passion, and verged a little on the burlesque, as passionate people generally do.

As if by the touch of a magic wand, a crowd sprang up around them; respectable passers-by, the pickets of the Kent Street gang on duty in the Borough, unwashed men and women who had been seeking shelter under shop-blinds, the doctor's boy, who had been maltreated and had a claim to urge for damages, a fish-woman, two tradesmen with their aprons on fresh from business, and shoals of boys who might have dropped from heaven, so suddenly did they take up the best places, and assume an interest in the adventure.

The prowler turned pale, and finched a little as Sidney approached, finched more as the audience seized the thread of discussion and expressed its comments more vociferously.

"Punch his head if he don't 'pologize, Sir: throw him into the mud, Sir: I'd cure him of coming after my gal: knock the bloke's hat off, and jump on it: lock him up!"

The prowler saw his danger; he had heard a great deal of the mercies of a London mob, and it was hemming him in now; and, like most men of the prowling class, he was at heart a coward. He succumbed.

"I never intended to insult the lady—if I have uttered a word to offend her, I am very sorry. It is all a misconception. But if the lady considers that I have taken a liberty in offering—in offering," he repeated, rather disturbed in his harangue by a violent shove from behind on to the unhappy doctor's boy, upon whose feet he alighted, "a common courtesy, I apologize with all my heart. I—"

"That will do, Sir," was the curt response; "you have had a narrow escape. Take it as a lesson."

Sidney was glad to back out of the absurd position into which he had thrust Harriet, to draw her hand through his arm and hasten away, offering a hundred excuses to her for his imprudence and impulsiveness.

He had not moved twenty yards with her when the yell of the mob—and the mob in that end of London possesses the finest blood-curdling yell in the world—startled him and all within half a mile of him. It was a dull night, and the wild elements of street life were fond of novelty; a swell had been caught insulting a British female in distress, and the unwashed hates swells like poison. An apology was not sufficient for the lookers-on; prostration on bended knees and hands outstretched would not have done; sackcloth and ashes vowed for the remainder of the delinquent's existence, would have been treated with contumely—all that was wanted was an uproar. The boys wanted an uproar because it was natural to them; the representatives of Kent Street, because it was in the way of trade, and one or two respectable gents had become interested in the dispute, and wore watch-chains; the women, because "he had not been served out as he deserved, the wretch!"

So the prowler, backing out of the crowd, met

with a sledge-hammer hand upon his hat, and found his hat off, and mud in his face, and then fists, and finally an upheaving of the whole mass toward him, sending him into the roadway like a shell from an Armstrong gun. There was no help for it, the prowler must run, and run he did, pursued by the terrible mob and that more terrible yell which woke up every recess in the Borough; and in this fashion the pursuer and the pursued sped down the muddy road toward the Elephant and Castle.

An empty Hansom cab offered itself to the runaway; he leaped in while it was being slowly driven down the Borough, and dashed his fist through the trap.

"Drive fast—double fare—~~Reform~~!"

The Hansom rattled off, the mob uttered one more despairing yell, and, after a slight abortive effort, gave up the chase, and left the prowler to his repentance.

And he did repent of mixing with life "over the water," for Great Suffolk Street never saw him again.

CHAPTER VI.

"IN THE FULLNESS OF THE HEART," ETC.

"Oh Harriet, I am very sorry!" burst forth Sidney, when the noise had died away, and Harriet Wesden, pale and silent, walked on by his side with her trembling hand upon his arm.

Harriet did not reply; her dignity had been outraged, and his defense had not greatly assisted her composure, though it had answered the purpose for which it was intended.

Sidney gulped down a lump in his throat, and glanced at the pretty, agitated face.

"You are offended with me—well, I deserve it. I'm a beast."

This self-depreciatory verdict having consoled him, and elicited no response from Harriet, he continued,

"I acted like a fool; I should have taken it coolly; why, he was more the gentleman of the two, scamp as he was. By George, I was near smashing him, though! Harriet," with eagerness, "you will look over my outburst. You're not so very much offended, are you?"

"No, I'm not offended, only the mob frightened me, and you were very violent. I don't know what else you could have done."

"Knocked him down and walked on, or given him in charge; knocked him down quietly would have been the most satisfactory method. How did it begin?"

"He followed and spoke to me. He has been hanging about the house for weeks."

"The dev—I beg pardon—has he though?"

Sidney Hinchford walked on; he had become suddenly thoughtful. More strongly than ever it recurred to him what a mistake he had made in not knocking down the prowler in a quiet and graceful manner.

"Mattie has noticed it and spoken to him about it, but he would not go away."

"Did he ever speak to you before to-night?"

"Never."

"He's a great blackguard!" Sidney blurted forth; "but there's an end of him. He'll not trouble you any more, Harriet; he did not know that you had a big brother to take care of you."

These sorts of fellows object to big brothers, they're in the way so much."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You oughtn't to go out at this time of night alone," he added, after a while; "it isn't exactly the thing, you know."

"No one spoke to me before."

"N—no; but it is not what I call proper."

"What you call proper, Mr. Hinchford! I'm sure I—"

"I beg pardon; of course any thing that I—I think proper is of no consequence to you. It's only my way of speaking out—rather too plainly. I offend the clerks in the office at times, and—and of course it's no business of mine, Harriet, although I did hope once that—that it would be. There!"

Harriet saw what was coming, or rather what had come. She was alarmed, although this was not her first offer, and the bloom of novelty had been lightly brushed off by that boarding-school folly of which she felt more ashamed every day. She began walking very fast, in much the same way from his passionate words as she had done from the frothy rapidity of that man, extinguished forever.

Sidney walked on with her; her hand was sliding from his arm when he made a clutch at it, and held it rather firmly. He went at his love affairs in a straightforward manner, his earnestness making up for his lack of eloquence.

"I know I've done it!" he said; "I know I should have kept this back a year or two—perhaps altogether—but it wouldn't answer, and it has made me miserable, out of sorts, and an enigma to the old dad. I'm only just twenty—of no position yet, but with a great hope to make one; I'm sure that I shall love you all my life, and never be happy without you; can you put up with a fellow like me, and say I may hope to teach you to love me some day?"

A strange fear beset Harriet—a fear of answering before the whirl of events had given her time to consider. She had never seriously thought of pledging herself to him; though her woman's quickness had guessed at his secret long since, she had never dreamed of him or felt her heart beat for him, as for that first love who had won her girl's fancy, and then faded away like a dream-figure. She was agitated from the preceding events of that night, and now, in an unlucky moment, he added to her embarrassment and made her brain whirl; she was scarcely herself, and did not answer like herself.

"Let go my hand, Sir—let me go home—I don't want to hear any more!"

"Very well," he answered; and was silent the rest of the way home; leaving her without a word in the shop, and passing through that side door reserved for the Hinchfords for the last thirteen years. Harriet, trembling and excited, almost stumbled into the back parlor, and began to sob forth a part of the adventures of that evening. Sidney, like the ghost of himself, stalked into the first-floor front, where his father was keeping a late tea for him.

The anxious eyes of the father glanced from under the bushy white brows; he was a student of human nature, so far as his son was concerned at least.

"Any thing wrong, Sid?"

"N—no," was the hesitant answer.

"You look troubled."

"I'm tired—dead beat."

"Let us get on with the tea, then," he said, assuming a cheery voice; "here's the *Times*, Sid."

"I have read it," was the hollow answer.

"Oh! I haven't—any news?"

"Tea gone up with a rush, I believe."

"Ah! good for the firm, I hope."

"Believe so—don't know. Phew! how infernally hot this room gets!"

Mr. Hinchford hazarded no more remarks; the curt replies of his son were sufficient indication of a reluctance to attend to him. He set out the tea-table, and superintended the duties thereof in a grave, fatherly manner, glancing askance at his son over the rim of his tea-cup. Sidney was in a mood that troubled the sire, for it was an unusual mood, and suggested something very much out of the way.

After tea, Sidney would compose himself and relate what had happened in the City to disturb him, and led him to respond churlishly to the old father, who had never given him a cross word in his life. He would wait Sidney's good time—there was no good hurrying the lad.

These two were something more than father and son; their long companionship together, unbroken upon by other ties, had engendered a concentrative affection which was a little out of the common—which more resembled in some respects the love existent between a good mother and daughter. They were friends, confidants, inseparable companions as well. The son's ambition was the father's, and all that interested and influenced the one equally affected the other. Sidney had made no friends from the counting-house or warehouse clerks; they were not "his sort," and he shunned their acquaintance. He was a young man of an unusual pattern, a trifle more grave than his years warranted, and endowed with more forethought than the whole business put together. He looked at life sternly—too sternly for his years—and his soul was absorbed in rising to a good position therein, for his father's sake as well as his own. His father was growing old; his memory was not so good as it used to be; Sid fancied that the time would shortly come when the builders would discover his father's defects, dismiss him with a week's salary, and find a younger and sharper man to supply his place. That was simply business in a commercial house; but it was death to the incapables, whom sharp practice swept out of the way. Sidney felt that he had no time to lose; that there must come a day when his father's position would depend upon himself; when he should have to work for both, as his father had worked for him when he was young and helpless and troublesome. Sidney's employers were kind, more than that, they were deeply interested in the strange specimen of a young man who worked hard, objected to holidays, and took work home with him when there was a pressure on the firm; he was honest, energetic, and truthful, and a servant with those requisites is always worth his weight in gold. They had conferred together, and resolved to make a partner of him in due course, when he was of age, or when he was five-and-twenty; and Sidney, though he had never been informed of their intentions, guessed it by some quick instinct, read it in their faces,

and believed that good luck would fall to his share some day. Still he never spoke of his hopes, save once to his father in a weak moment, of which he ever after repented, for his father was of a more sanguine nature, and inclined to build his castles too rapidly. Sidney knew the uncertainties of life, more especially of city life, and he proceeded quietly on his way, keeping his hopes under pressure, and talking and thinking like a clerk in the City who never expected to reach higher than two or three hundred a year.

Yet with all his prudence he was, singular to relate, not of a reticent nature; he was a young man who spoke out, and hated mystery or suspense.

Possibly in this last instance he had spoken out too quickly for Harriet Wesden; and though suspense was over, he did not feel pleased with his tactics of that particular evening. And he was inclined to keep back all the unpleasant reminiscences of that night, sink them forever in the waters of oblivion, and never let a soul know what an ass he had made of himself. It was his first imprudence, and he was aggrieved at it; he had given way to impulse, and suffered his love to escape at an unpropitious moment; his ears burned to think of all the folly which he had committed.

In a bad temper—he who was generally so calm and equable—he took his tea, and shunned his father's inspection by turning his back upon him. After a while he took up the *Times*, which he had previously declined, and feigned an interest in the "Want Places." Mattie came in and out of the room with the hot water, etc.; she waited on the Hinchfords when Ann of all work was weak in the ankles, which was of frequent occurrence. Mattie made herself generally useful, and rather liked trouble than not. With a multiplicity of tasks on her mind she was always more cheerful; it was only when there was nothing to do that her face assumed a sternness of expression as if the shadow of her early days were settling there.

Mattie, bustling to and fro in attendance upon the Hinchfords, observed all and said nothing, like a sensible girl. She was quick enough to see that something unusual had happened above stairs as well as below, and her interest was as great in these two friends—and *helpers*—as in the Wesdens. She would have every body happy in that house; it had been a lucky house for her, and it should be for all in it, if she possessed the power to make it so.

She saw that one trouble had come at least; and looking intently at Sidney's grim face—she had busied herself with the bread-and-butter plate to get a good look at it—she read its story more plainly than he would have liked.

Outside the door she paused and put "this and that together"—*this* in the drawing-room and *that* in the parlor, and jumped at once at the right conclusion, with a rapidity that did infinite credit to her seventeen years. Seventeen years then, and rather shorter than ever, if that were possible.

"He has been courting Harriet—I know he has!" she said; "and Harriet's been in a tantrum, and said some thing to cross him—that's it!"

She missed a step and shook up the tea-things

that she was carrying down stairs. This recalled her to the duties of her situation.

"One thing at a time, Mattie, my dear," she said, in a patronizing way to herself, as she descended to the lower regions. In those lower regions poor Ann Packet created another divergence of thought. Ann's ankles continued to swell; she had been much on her feet during the last heavy wash, and the gloomy thought had stolen to her, that her new calamity—she was a woman born for calamities—would end in the hospital.

This idea having just seized her, she communicated it at once to Mattie, upon her reappearance in the kitchen.

"Mattie," said Ann, lugubriously, "I've been a good friend to you, all my life—ain't I?"

"To be sure you have," was the quick answer.

"When you came here first, a reg'lar young rip, I took to you, taught you what was tidiness, which you didn't know any more than the babe unborn, did you?"

"Not much more—don't you feel so well to-night, Ann?"

"Much wus; I'm only forty, and my legs oughtn't to go at that age."

"No, and they won't."

"Won't they?" was the ironical answer; "but they will—but they has! Oh! Mattie gal, you'll come and see me at St. Tummas's?"

"Ann Packet," said Mattie, gravely, "this won't do. You're getting your old horrors again, and you're full of fancies, and your ankles are not half so bad as you think they are. I know what you want."

"What?"

"A good shaking," laughed Mattie, "that's all."

"Oh! you unnat'ral child!"

"Well, the unnat'ral child will ask Mr. Wenden if she may keep out of the shop to-night, and bring a book down stairs to read to you, over your needle-work. But if you don't work I sha'n't read, Ann—is it a bargain?"

"You're allus imperent; but get the book, if master 'll let you. Oh! how *they* do shoot!"

Mattie obtained permission, brought down a book from the store, and sat down to read to honest Ann. She had made a good choice, and Ann was soon interested, forgot her ailments, and stitched away with excitable rapidity. Mattie had no time for thoughts of her own, or the new mystery above stairs till the supper hour. She read on till the Hinchford bell rang once more; then she closed the book, and met with her reward in Ann's large red hand falling heavily, yet affectionately, on her shoulder.

"Thankee, Mattie. I'll do as much for you some day, gal."

"When you can spell, or when I've gouty ankles, Ann?"

"Ah! get out with you! I'm only fit for making game on, you think. I'm a poor woman, who never had the time to larn to read, and the likes of you can laugh at me."

"No—only try to make you laugh, Ann. You're not cross?"

"God bless you! not I," she ejaculated spasmodically. "There, go about your work, and don't think any thing of what an old fool like me talks about."

Mattie busied herself with the supper tray, the

bread, cheese, knives and plates, and then bore them away in her strong arms; Ann watched her out of the room, and then produced an indifferently clean cotton handkerchief, with which she wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

"To think how that gal has altered since she first came here, a little ragged thing," soliloquized Ann, "a gal who skeered you with the vulgar words she'd picked up in the streets, and was so awful ignorant, you blushed for her. And now the briskiest and best of gals; if I don't spend all my money in doctors stuff afore I die, that Mattie shall have every penny of it. It's in my will so; they put it down in black and white for me, and she'll never know it till I'm—I'm gone!"

A prospect that caused Ann Packet to weep afresh; a dismal, but a soft-hearted woman, who had passed through life with no one to love, until she met with the stray. She was a stray herself, picked up at the work-house gate, to the disgust of the relieving officer, and turned out to service as soon as she could walk and talk, and a mistress be found for her; lonely in the world herself, she had, when the time came round, taken to one more forlorn and friendless than ever she had been. And she *had* left her all her money—fourteen pounds, seven and sevenpence, put out at interest, two and seven-eighths, in the Finsbury Savings Bank, whither her ankles refused to carry her to get her book made up, another trouble at that time which kept her mind unsettled.

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENCE.

WHILE Mattie read to her fellow-workman, consolation was also being attempted in the drawing-room that she had quitted. Consolation attempted by the father after a while to his son.

After a while, for an hour passed before a word was exchanged, and Sidney Hinchford still held the newspaper before him, staring at it, without comprehending a word. A singular position for him to adopt; a youth of twenty, who never wasted time, who had always something on his hands to fill up his evenings at home, who was very often too busy to play backgammon with his father.

That father was troubled; his heart was in his son's peace of mind; there was nothing that he would not have sacrificed for it, had it lain in his power. His pride was in his son's advancement, his son's ability, and he fancied that a great trouble had occurred at the business to change the scene in which both played their parts. He was less strong-minded and more nervous than he had been four years ago, and so less affected him.

When the hour had passed, and he had grown tired of Sidney's silence, he said, with something of his son's straightforwardness,

"What's the matter, Sid?"

Sidney crumpled the paper in his hands, and flung it on the table; he was tired, even a little ashamed of his sullen deportment.

"A matter that I ought to keep to myself, it being a foolish one, Sir," he answered; "but, if you wish, I will relate it."

"If you wish, Sid," was the courteous answer; "I have no wish to hear any thing that you would desire to keep back from me. If you think I can be of no use to you, give you no advice, offer no consolation that you may think worthy of acceptance, and if," with a very wistful glance toward him, "you consider it a matter that concerns yourself alone, why I—I don't wish to intrude upon your confidence."

"I don't think that we have had any secrets from each other yet; I don't see any reason why we should begin to get mysterious, father," Sidney replied; "and so, here's the full, true, and particular account."

Mr. Hinchford edged his chair nearer to his son, the son turned and looked his father in the face, blushing just a little at the beginning of his narrative.

"It's an odd thing for one man to tell another," he said, quickly; "but it's what you ought to know, and though it makes me wince a little, it's soon over. I've been thinking of engaging myself to—"

"Not to another firm, Sid—now!" cried the father, as he paused.

"To Harriet Wesden, down stairs."

"God bless me!"

Mr. Hinchford passed his hands through his scanty white hairs, stroked his mustache, blew at an imaginary something in the air, loosened his stock, and gasped a little. His son engaging himself to be married was a new element to perplex him; he had never believed in human nature, or the Hinchford nature, taking that turn for years and years. Once or twice he had thought that his careful son might some day look around him and *marry well*; but that at twenty years of age he should have fallen in love, was a miracle that took some minutes to believe in.

"Well," he said, at last.

"I should have said, father, that I had been thinking of an engagement—a long one to end in a happy marriage, when there was fair sailing for all of us—and that my thoughts found words when I least expected them, and surprised Harriet by their suddenness. I told her I loved her, and she told me that she didn't—and there's an end of it! We need not speak of the affair again, you know."

"And that she didn't!" quoted the father, "why, that's more amazing still!"

"On the contrary, that is the most natural part of it."

"And she really said—"

"She said that she did not want any more of my jaw—rather more elegantly expressed, but that is what she meant. Well, I was a fool!"

Mr. Hinchford sat and reflected, becoming graver every instant. He did not attempt to make light of the story, to treat it as one of those trifles 'light as air,' which a breath would disperse. His son's was neither a frivolous nor a romantic nature, and he treated even his twenty years with respect. Mr. Hinchford was astonished also at his own short-sightedness; the strangeness of this love passage darting across the monotony of his quiet way, without a flash from the danger signal by way of hint at its approach. He saw how it was to end, very clearly now, he thought; Harriet Wesden and his son would contract an early engagement, marry in haste, and cut him off by a flank movement

from his son's society. He saw the new loves replacing the old, and himself, white-haired and feeble, isolated from the boy to whom his heart yearned. He scarcely knew how he had idolized his son, until the revelation of this night. Still he was one of the least selfish men in the world; Sidney's happiness first, and then the thought how best to promote his own.

After a few more questions and answers Mr. Hinchford mastered the position of affairs. Harriet Wesden loved his boy—that was a certainty, and to be expected—and her timid embarrassment at Sid's sudden proposal, and her nervous escape from it, were but natural in that sex which poor Sid knew so little concerning. And the Wesdens, *père et mère*, why, they would be proud of the match; for Sid's abilities would make a gentleman of him, and Sid in good time—all in good time—would raise the stationer's daughter to a position of which she might well be proud. He liked the Wesdens, but heigh-ho! he had looked forward to his boy doing better in the world, finding a wife more suitable for him in the future.

It was all plain enough, but he furnished up his philosophy, nevertheless—that odd philosophy which, at variance with his brighter thoughts, sought to prepare those to whom it appealed for the worst that might happen. He looked at the worst aspect of things while his heart had not a doubt of the best; he would have prepared all the world for the keenest disappointments, and been the man to give way most, and to be the most astounded at the result, had his prophecies come true. Years ago he foretold Mattie's ingratitude and duplicity in return for his patronage; but he had not believed a word of his forebodings. He had told his son not to build upon so improbable a thing as a partnership with his employers at so early an age; but he was more feverishly expectant than his son, and so positive that his son's abilities would be thus rewarded, that his pride had expanded of late years, and he talked more like the rich man he had been once himself.

Mr. Hinchford prepared his son for the worst that evening; and the son, knowing his character, felt a shadow removed at every dismal conjecture as to how the little love affair would terminate.

"You can't let it rest here, however bad it may turn out, Sid."

"No, of course not."

"You must see Harriet's father in the morning, and make a clean breast of it; and then if he turn you off with a short word—feeling himself a rich man, and above the connection—why, you will put up with it gravely, and like a Hinchford. There are a great many things against your chances, my boy."

"We're both too young, perhaps," suggested Sidney, more dolefully.

"Years too young," was the reply; "and people have unpleasant habits of changing their minds—and then what a fix it would be, Sid! Why, Harriet Wesden's not eighteen till next month—quite a child."

"No, I'm hanged if she is!" burst forth Sidney.

"Well then, you're but a boy, after all; and these long and early engagements are bad things for both. But still as it has come, you must

speak to the old people; and if they have no objection—which I think they will have—and Harriet is inclined to accept you—which I think she isn't—why, make the best of it, work on in the old sure and steady fashion; you're worth waiting for, my lad."

"Thank you, dad," was the reply; "you're very kind, but your opinion of me is not the world's. I'm a cross-grained, unforgiving, disagreeable person—there!"

"In your enemy's estimation—but your friends?"

"I don't know that I have any."

"Oh! we shall see; and if you have not any abroad," he added, "you must put up with the old one at home, Sid."

"He will put up with me, I hope; he will remember that I have only him yet a while to tell my hopes and fears to, standing in the place of the mother."

"Ah! the good mother, lost so early to us! she should have heard this story, Sid."

The old man snatched up the paper and began reading; the son turned to his own work at last, and was soon buried in accounts. But the paper was uninteresting, and the accounts foggy; after a while both gave it up, and talked again of the old subject. Sid's full heart overflowed that night, and his reticence belonged not to it; he was sure of sympathy with his feelings, and had the mother—ever a gentle and dear listener—been at his side, he could not have more fully dwelt upon the love which had troubled him so long, and which he had kept so well concealed. It had grown with his growth; Harriet's play-fellow, Harriet's brother, finally Harriet's lover. Page after page, chapter after chapter of the story which begins ever the same, and only darts off at a tangent when the crisis, such as his, comes in due course, to end in various ways—happily, deplorably—in the sunshine of comedy, the mystery of melodrama, the darkness of tragedy, taking its hues from the "surroundings," and giving us poor scribes no end of subjects to write upon.

Mr. Hinchford was a patient listener; other men might have been wearied by the romantic side to a love-sick youth's character; but Sid was a part of himself, and he had no ambition, no hope in which his son did not stand in the fore-ground, a bright figure to keep him rejoicing.

Supper served and over, Sidney retired to his share in the double-bedded room at the back—the shabby room with which Mr. Hinchford had lately grown disgusted, and even wished to quit, knowing not his son's reason for remaining—leaving the father to fill his after-supper pipe before the fire. Mr. Hinchford was in a reflective, wide-awake mood, and not inclined for rest just then; he sat with his slippered feet on the fender, puffing away at his meerschaum. Had he not promised his son to keep away from Mr. Wesden until the *dénouement* had been brought about by Sid's own method, he would have gone down stairs and talked it over with the old people; but the promise given, he would sit there and think of his son's chances, and pray for them, as they were nearest his heart then.

He was a father who understood human nature a little—not so much as he fancied himself,

but who was, nevertheless, a man of discernment, when his simple vanity did not stand in the way.

He had not thought deeply of Harriet Wesden before; now that there loomed before him the prospect of calling her "daughter," he conjured up every reminiscence connected with her, and set himself to think whether such a girl were likely to make Sid happy, or to love Sid as that pure-hearted, honest lad deserved. He was astonished, after a while, at the depth of his researches into the past; he could remember her a light-hearted child, a vivacious girl, now, presto, a woman, whom Sid sought for a wife; he could see her flitting before him, a pretty girl, swayed a little by the impulse of the hour, and verging on extremes; he called to mind certain traits of character that had struck him more than once, and had then been forgotten in the hurrying passage of events foreign to her; he sat studying an abstruse volume, and perplexing himself with its faintly written characters. Mothers have had such thoughts, and made them the business of a life, sorrowing and rejoicing over them, and praying for their children's future; seldom fathers, before whom are ever the counting-house in the City, the bargains to be made in the mart or on the exchange, the accommodation to be had at the bankers'.

Hinchford thought like a woman; he was a clerk whose business thoughts ended when he came home at night, and he was alone in the world with one hope. All the old worldly thoughts lay apart from him, and the affections of paternity were stronger within him in consequence. He lived for Sid, not for himself.

He was still in a brown study, when the shuffling feet of Mrs. Wesden, being assisted up stairs by her husband to the top back room, disturbed him for an instant; then the rustle of a dress and the light footfall of the daughter assured him of Harriet's retirement. All was still in that crowded house, which he had wished to exchange a year ago for a house in the suburbs suitable to the united salaries of himself and boy. He thought of that wish, and sighed to think it had not been carried out; for, after all, he was not quite satisfied with the turn affairs had taken.

The door opened suddenly and startled his nerves. He turned a scared face toward the intruder, who jumped a little at the sight of him sitting before the grate, black, yawning and uninviting at that hour.

"I thought you had gone, Mr. Hinchford," said Mattie; "I came for the supper-tray and to tidy up a bit here, and save time in the morning."

"How's Ana?" he asked, absently.

"Better, I think," replied Mattie, still standing at the door.

"You can clear away; I'm going in a minute. How's the evening-school, girl?"

"Why, I have left it this twelvemonth!"

"To be sure. I had forgotten that you had learned all that they could teach you, and had become too much of a woman. Why, we shall hear of you being married next."

"Who's going to be married now—Mr. Sidney?"

"Confound you! how sharp you are!" said Mr. Hinchford, a little dismayed. "No, I never

said so. Mind, I never said a word, so don't let us have any ridiculous tattling."

"I never tattle," said Mattie, in an offended tone. "Oh, Mr. Hinchford!" she added, suddenly, "you can always trust me with any thing."

"I hope so, Mattie—I hope so."

"And if Mr. Sidney thinks of marrying our Harriet, you may trust me not to let the people round here know a word about it. Not a word, Sir!" she repeated, with pursed lips.

Mr. Hinchford ran his hands through his hair, and loosened his stock again. He was confused; he had betrayed his hand, and made a mess of it, or else Mattie knew more than he gave her credit for: it was doubtful which.

"Mattie," he said, after a while, when that young woman, rapid in her movements, had packed the tray, and was proceeding to retire with it.

"Yes, Sir."

She left the table and came nearer to him.

"Whatever made you think that my dear boy was likely to—to take a fancy to Harriet?"

"I've noticed that he talks to her a good deal, and comes into the back parlor a great deal, and brightens up when she speaks to him, and you can see his eyes dancing away behind the little spectacles he's taken to—and very becoming they are, Sir."

"Very," asserted the old gentleman.

"And he's always dull when she's out, and fidgets till he knows where she has gone, and tries to make me tell; and so I've fancied, oh! ever so long, that Harriet and he would make a match of it some day."

He was amazed at this girl ascertaining the truth before himself, but he retained his cool demeanor.

"Some long day hence, mayhap—who can tell?"

"Love's as uncertain as life—isn't it, Sir?"

"Ahem—yes."

"At least I've read so," corrected Mattie.

"It's a thing I shall never understand, Mr. Hinchford."

"Time enough—time enough, my girl."

"But our Harriet, she's pretty, she's a lady, she's meant to be loved by every body she meets, and she's the only one that's good enough to marry him."

She lowered her voice at the last word, and made a quick movement with her hand in the direction of the adjoining room.

"You are very fond of Harriet, Mattie?" said Mr. Hinchford, curiously.

"As I need be, Sir, surely."

"Ah! surely—she is amiable and kind."

"Always so, I think."

"A little thoughtless, perhaps—eh?"

He was curious concerning Harriet Wesden now—no match-making mother could have taken more indirect and artful means to elicit the truth concerning her child's elect.

"Why, that's it!" exclaimed Mattie; "that's why Mr. Sidney ought to marry her."

"Oh! is it?"

"You'll see, Sir," said Mattie, suddenly drawing a chair close to Mr. Hinchford, and assuming a position on the edge thereof; "you'll soon see, Sir, what I mean by that."

"Yes—yes."

It was a strange picture, with an odd couple

C

in the fore-ground; Harriet Wesden, Sidney Hinchford, or afflicted Ann Packet, coming in suddenly, would have been puzzled what to make of it. The burlesque side to the scene did not strike Mr. Hinchford till long afterward; the slight figure of the girl on the chair before him, the rapid manner in which she expounded her theory, her animation, sudden gestures, and, above all, his own intense interest in the theme, and forgetfulness of the confidence he placed in her by his own absorbent pose. He had put his pipe aside, and, open-mouthed and round-eyed, was drinking in every word, clutching his knees with his hands meanwhile.

"Mr. Sidney isn't thoughtless. He's careful, and he has a reason for every thing, and he will keep her from harm all her life. She'll be the best and brightest of wives to him if they should ever marry, which I do hope and pray they will, Sir, soon. I'm sure there are no two who would make a happier couple, and oh!—to see them happy," clapping her hands together, "what would I give!"

"You haven't lost your interest in us, then, Mattie?"

"When I forget the prayers that Mrs. Wesden taught me, or the first words of yours that set me thinking that I might grow good, or all the kindness which every body in this house has shown for me, then I shall lose that, Sir—not before!"

"You're an uncommon girl, Mattie."

"No, Sir."

"You show an uncommon phase—great gratitude for little kindnesses. I'm glad to see this interest in Harriet and my boy; perhaps they might do worse than make a match of it. But—but," suddenly returning to the subject which engrossed him, "hasn't it struck you—just a little, mind, nothing to speak of—that Harriet Wesden is a trifle vain?"

"Wouldn't you be proud of your good looks if you had any?" was the sharp rejoinder.

"Um," coughed he, "I dare say I might."

"I should be always staring at myself in the glass if I had her complexion, her golden hair, her lovely blue eyes. I should be proud to think that my pretty face had made my happiness by bringing the thoughts of such a son as yours to me."

"Ah! I didn't see it in that light," said he, tugging at his stock again, "and I—I dare say every thing will turn out for the best. We will not dwell upon this any more, but let things take their course, and not spoil them by interference, or by talking about them, Mattie."

"Don't fear me," said Mattie, rising.

"I don't think it is our place," he added, associating himself with Mattie, to render his hints less personal, "to be curious about it, and seek to pry into what is going on in the hearts of these young people. Do you think now, Mattie, that she's inclined to be fond of—of my Sid?"

"I don't say she'd own it just now, but I think she is. Why shouldn't she be?"

"Ah!—why, indeed. There's not a boy like him in the whole parish."

"No, Sir."

"And Harriet Wesden will be a lucky girl."

"Ah! that she will!"

"And—now good-night, Mattie, and the less we repeat of this gossip the better."

"Certainly—things had better take their course without *our* interference."

"Yes," was the dry answer.

Mattie seized her tray, and prepared to depart. At the door, with her burden *en avance*, she paused, went back to the table, replaced her tray, and returned to Mr. Hinchford's side.

"Something happened to-night! The dear girl has been disturbed; I hope Mr. Sidney has not been in a hurry, and—"

"Hush! I don't think he's asleep. Good-night—good-night."

"When *she* was a year younger it was hard work to keep back what was in her heart from me; but she's growing older in her ways, and better able to understand that I'm only a poor servant, after all. I don't complain," said Mattie; "she's always kind and good to me, but she's my mistress's daughter, rather than the sister—or something like the sister—that used to be. And I do so like to know every thing, Sir!"

"So it seems," remarked Mr. Hinchford.

"Every thing that concerns her, I mean—because I might be of help when she least expected it. And so Mr. Sidney has told her all about it to-night?"

"I never said so," cried the embarrassed old gentleman.

"Well, I only guess at it," answered Mattie; "I shall soon come to the rights of it if I keep a good look-out."

She caught up her tray again, and marched to the door to ponder anew. Mr. Hinchford writhed on his chair—would this loquacious diminutive help never go down stairs and leave him in peace? She asked no more questions, however.

"And to think that what I fancied would happen is all coming round like a story-book, just as I hoped it would be, for her sake—for his sake—years and years ago! How nicely things come round, Sir, don't they?"

"Don't they!" he re-echoed.

Mattie departed, and the old gentleman blew at invisibility in the air once more.

"How that girl does talk!—it is her one fault—loquacity. If she can only find a listener, she's happy. And yet, when I come to consider it, that girl's always happy—for she's thankful and content. And things are coming nicely round, she says—well, I hope so!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SIDNEY STATES HIS INTENTIONS.

MR. WESDEN, if not the first person up in the house, was at least the first person who superintended business in the morning. For years that little shop had been opened punctually at six A.M. When the boy had not arrived to take down the shutters, Mr. Wesden lowered them himself. Tradesfolk over the way, early mechanics sallying forth to work from the back streets adjacent, the policeman on duty, the milk-boy, and the woman with the water-cresses, knew when it was six o'clock in Great Suffolk Street by the opening of Mr. Wesden's shop.

Mr. Wesden prided himself upon this punctuality, and not even to Mattie would he intrust the duties of commencing the labors of the day,

despite the inflexibility of his back after a night's "rest."

Sidney Hinchford; who knew Mr. Wesden's habits, therefore found no difficulty in meeting with that gentleman at five minutes past the early hour mentioned.

"Good-morning, Mr. Wesden."

"Good-morning, Sidney."

Mr. Wesden was sitting behind his counter, in business position, ready for customers; the morning papers had not come in from the agent—he had given up of late years fetching them from the office himself—and there was not much to distract him from full attention to all that Sidney had to communicate.

"I thought I should find you handy for a serious bit of talk, Sir."

Mr. Wesden looked at him, and his face assumed a degree of extra gravity. Sidney Hinchford had got into debt with his tailor, and wished to borrow a few pounds "on the quiet."

"I suppose Harriet told you last night what happened?"

"Not all that happened, I fancy."

"Then she waited for me, possibly," he said, a little taken aback nevertheless, "or told her mother. Well, you see, to make a long story short, Mr. Wesden, I have taken the liberty of falling in love with your daughter, as was natural and to be expected, and I have come down early this morning to tell you plainly that that's the state of my feelings, and that if you have any thing to say against it or me, why you can clap on the extinguisher, and no one a bit the wiser."

Mr. Wesden was a man who never showed his surprise by any thing more than an intenser stare than usual; he sat looking stolidly at Sidney Hinchford, who leaned over the counter with flushed cheeks and earnest eyes, surveying him through his glasses.

Still Mr. Wesden was surprised—in fact, very much astonished. Only a year or two ago, and the tall young man before him was a little boy fresh from school, and a source of trouble to him when he got near the tinsel drawer, and Skell's Scenes and Characters; now he was talking of love matters.

"You're the first customer this morning, Sidney, and you've asked for a rum article," he said, bluntly.

"Which you'll not refuse me, I hope, Sir—which you'll give me a chance of explaining, at all events."

"What does Harriet say?"

"I've—I've only just said a few words to her—more than I ought to have said, perhaps, before I know her feelings toward me, or what your wishes were, Sir."

Sidney, very humble and deferential to paterfamilias, after taking the case in his own hands, like all young hypocrites who have this terrible ordeal to pass, and are doubtful of the upshot.

Mr. Wesden listened and stared—clean over Sidney's head, rather than at him. Had he not had a long experience of the stationer's ways he would have augured ill for his prospects from the stolidity with which his news was received; but Mr. Wesden was always a grave and reserved man, and his immobile features did not alarm the young suitor.

"Well, and what's to keep her and you—*my money?*"

"Not a farthing of it, Sir, by your good leave," said Sidney, proudly; "I wish to work on and wait for her. I have every hope of attaining to a good position in my office; I think I see my way clearly; I won't ask you to let her marry me till I can show you a home of my own, and a little money in the bank, Sir."

"Why didn't you wait till then?" was the dry question.

"Why, because a fellow wants a hope to live on—permission from you to pay his addresses to Miss Harriet, and to ask her to give me a hope too."

"I see."

Mr. Wesden fidgeted about his top drawers, folded some papers, looked in his till, and then turned his little withered face to Sidney. The face had altered, was brighter, even wore a smile, and Sidney's heart leaped again.

"If you'd been like most young men I should have said 'Not yet.' But you haven't crept about the bush, and you've dealt fair, and I'll promise all I can without tying the girl up too closely."

"Tying her up!"

"The home of your own hasn't turned up yet," shrewdly remarked the stationer; "and though I believe that and the money will, we may as well wait for some signs of them. And—"

"Well, well."

"Don't you be in a hurry, young man; breath don't come so fast as it did, and I'm not used to long speeches."

"Take your time, Sir—I beg pardon."

"And Harriet's very young, and may see some one else to like better."

"I hope not, Sir."

"And you are very young, and may see some one else too."

"Oh! Mr. Wesden."

"Ah! it's shocking to think of, but these awful events do occur," said the old man, satirically; "and, besides, my old lady and I are ignorant people in one way, and mayn't suit you when you get bigger and prouder."

"Mr. Wesden, you'll not fancy that, I know."

"You'll have to think whether, when you are a great man, you'll be able to put up with the old lady and me coming to see our girl sometimes."

Sidney entered another protest—was prolific, even liberal in his invitations, which he issued on the spot.

"Then if it's not an engagement, or what I call downright keeping company just yet—say for another year at least, I sha'n't turn my back upon you."

"Thank you, Sir; you are more than generous."

He leaned across the counter and shook hands with Mr. Wesden; the news-agent drove up in his pony-cart at the same moment, and directly afterward had flung a heavy bundle of the "early mornings" upon the counter; the news-boy entered, and waited for orders for his first round; a little girl came in for a penny postage stamp, change for six-pence, and a piece of paper to wrap the lot in. Business was beginning in Great Suffolk Street, and Sidney Hinchford getting in the way. Sidney would have liked to add a little more, but Mr. Wesden stopped him.

"Harriet's been down this half hour," he said; "I suppose you know that."

"Indeed I did not, Sir," exclaimed Sidney, with a wild glance toward the parlor.

Harriet was there, busying herself with the breakfast-cloth—a domestic picture, fair and glowing. He dashed into the parlor, and Harriet, prepared for him now, listened demurely, felt her heart plunging a little, but did not rebuke him with any words similar to those of yesternight. His despairing look of that period had kept her restless all night; she could not bear to know that others were unhappy, and she fancied that she should soon learn to love him, if she did not love him already, for his manliness and frankness. So she listened, and Sidney detailed his interview with her father, and her father's wish that it should not be considered an engagement between them until at least another year had passed.

"We are to go on just the same as if nothing had happened, but—but I wish you to look forward to the end of that year like myself, to have hope in me and my efforts, and to give me hopes of you."

"Am I worth hoping for, Sidney?" was the rejoinder; "you don't know half the foolishness of which I have been guilty—what a weak, frivolous, romantic girl I have been."

She thought of her Brighton romance, opened the book, and then shut it hastily again. It was a story he had no right to know yet, and she had not the courage to tell him just then—it belonged wholly to the past; so rake the dead leaves over it and let it rest again!

Let it rest, then; there was no engagement. Both were free to change their minds before the year was out in which the strength of their love would be put to the test. For that year nothing more than friends, she thought, or a something more than friends, and less than lovers.

The half bargain was concluded, and Sidney went on his way rejoicing. There was rejoicing in the hearts of all in that house for a while. Mrs. Wesden cried over her girl as though she was going away to-morrow, but talked as if it were a settled engagement, and was glad that Sidney Hinchford was to be her son-in-law some day. Mr. Hinchford and Mr. Wesden smoked their pipes together that evening, and talked about it in short disjointed sentences, amidst which Mr. Hinchford learned that Mr. Wesden would retire from business before the year's probation had expired, leaving Mattie, possibly, in charge. Mattie and Ann Packet in the lower regions dwelt upon the same subject, free debatable ground, which no one cared to hem round by restrictions.

Late in the evening Mattie stole up to Harriet's bedroom, and knocked softly at the panels of the door.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"To be sure, Mattie."

"I thought that you would be sitting here thinking of it."

"Thinking of what, Mattie?"

"Ah! you don't tell me any thing now; but I can guess; and Mr. Sidney did not sit in the parlor all the evening for nothing!"

"No, Mattie; but it's not a downright engagement yet. I'm to try if I can like Sidney first."

"That's the best way—didn't I say that this would happen some day, Miss Harriet?"

"But it hasn't happened yet."

"Ah! but it will—I see it all now as plain as a book. I said only last night that things were coming round nicely for us all. And they are—they are!"

Harriet began to cry, and to beg Mattie to desist. For an instant the sanguine assertion sounded like a vain prophecy, and jarred strangely on her nerves, bringing forth tears and heavy

sobs, and a fear of that future which stretched forth radiantly beyond to Mattie's vision. After all, Harriet was but a girl, and had not thought very deeply of all that the contract implied between Sidney and herself. And after all, *were* things coming round nicely?—or was the red glow in the sky lurid and threatening to her, and more than her?

This is scarcely a quiet story, and we are only at the end of the second book. What does the astute novel-reader think?

BOOK III.

UNDER SUSPICION.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD FRIEND.

MR. WESDEN retired from business. After thirty or forty years' application to the arduous task of "keeping house and home together;" after much hesitation as to whether it were safe and practicable and he could afford it; after a struggle with his old habits of shop-keeping, and a deliberate survey of his position from all points of the compass, he migrated from Great Suffolk Street, and settled down in what he considered country—a back street in the Camberwell New Road, commanding views of a cabbage-field, a public house, and another back street in course of formation by an enterprising builder.

This was country enough for Mr. Wesden, and handy for town and Great Suffolk Street. For he had scarcely retired from business, merely withdrawn himself from the direct management, the sales over the counter, and the worry of the news-boys. The name of Wesden was still over the door, and Mattie remained general manager at the old shop, which had been her refuge from the world in the hard times of her girlhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Wesden then considered themselves in the country. They had humble notions, and a little contented them. There was a back garden with a grass-plot, a gravel-walk, two rows of box edging, and a few flower-beds; surely that was country enough for any body, they thought. Then it was quite a mansion of a house—six rooms exclusive of kitchen; and, thanks more to Harriet's taste than her parents', was neatly and prettily furnished.

It was a change from Great Suffolk Street. Harriet Wesden had been brought up with lady-like notions, and had never taken to the shop; it was pleasant to live in a private house, practice her piano, assist her mother in the gardening, and have a young man to come courting her "once or twice a week." Mr. Wesden, with habits more formed for shop life, had to struggle hard before he could accustom himself to the novelty of his position; in his heart he never felt thoroughly at home, and was always glad of an excuse to walk over to Great Suffolk Street. He could not sit on the new chairs all day, and stare at the roses on the carpet; there was nothing much to see out of window save the post-man, pot-boy, grocer's boy, and butcher, at regular intervals; gardening did not agree with his back, and it was hard work to get through the day, unless he went for a walk with the old lady.

The old lady aforesaid had taken quite a new lease of life; absence from the close neighborhood of Suffolk Street had given her back some of her old strength; for twenty years she had solaced herself with the thought of "retiring"—the one ambition of a tradesman's wife—and now it had come, and she was all the better for the change. She made such good use of her limbs

at intervals, became so absorbed in training sweet-williams, and picking the snails off the white lilies, brightened up so much in that small suburban retreat, that the old gentleman—always be it remembered of a suspicious turn—doubted in his own mind if Mrs. W. had not been "shamming Abraham" in Great Suffolk Street.

Harriet was not nineteen years of age yet, and business had not been left in Mattie's charge three months when Mr. Wesden's character began to mould itself afresh. The change which had done mother and daughter good altered Mr. Wesden for the worse. He became irritable, at times a little despondent; nothing to do began seriously to affect his temper. This is a common result in men who have been in harness all their lives: steady, energetic shop-keepers, whose lives have been one bustle for a quarter of a century and upward, find retiring from business not so fine a thing as it looked from the distance, when they were in debt to the wholesale purveyors.

Mr. Wesden did not like it; if the truth must be spoken, though he kept it to himself, for appearances sake, he absolutely hated it. He was not intended for a gentleman, and he could not waste time; it made his head ache, and gave him the heart-burn. If it had not been for the shop in Great Suffolk Street he would have gone melancholy mad or taken to drinking; that shop was his safety-valve, and he was only his old self when he was back in it pottering over the stock.

Unfortunately his *new* self was never more highly developed than when he had returned to Camberwell, and woe to the beggar or the brass band that halted before his gates and worried him!

Meanwhile the shop in Great Suffolk Street continued to do its steady and safe business. Mattie was not far from eighteen years of age, proud of her position of trust, the quickest and best of shop-keepers. On the first-floor still resided Mr. Hinchford and his son; the place was handy for office yet, and they were biding their time to launch forth and assert their true position in society. The rent was moderate, and Sidney was trying hard to save money out of his salary; there were incentives to save, and at times he was even a trifle too economical for his father's tastes. Still he erred on the right side—his father was becoming weaker, and his father's memory was not what it had been—his employers had not spoken of the partnership lately, and there might be rainy days ahead, which it was policy to prepare for—in a world of changes, who could tell what might happen?

Mattie found it dull at first after the Wesdens' departure; the place seemed full of echoes, and one bright face at least was hard to lose. But the face came often to light up the old shop again; and on alternate Sundays she went to

dine at the fine house at Camberwell, leaving Ann Packet in charge of the establishment.

Still she was soon "at home;" she was a dependent, and must expect changes; she was a girl who always made the best of every thing. There was no time for her to regret the alterations; she was born for work, and there was plenty to do in Mr. Wesden's business, not to mention a watch upon Ann Packet at times, who, when "afflicted," was rather remiss in her attentions upon the lodgers.

Life was not monotonous with her, for she took an interest in her work; and if it had been, there were many gleams of sunshine athwart it; those who knew her best loved her, and had confidence in her. Many in Suffolk Street thought there wasn't such a young woman in the world; a butcher over the way—a young man beginning business for himself—thought that it would be a "good spec" to have such a young woman behind his counter attending to the customers; those who knew her history, and there were many in Suffolk Street who remembered her antecedents, wondered at her progress. All was well until the autumn set in, and then the tide turned in the affairs of Mattie, and on those good friends whom Mattie loved.

One afternoon in September Mattie was busy in the shop, as usual—she kept to the shop all day, and never adopted the plan of hiding away from customers in the back parlor—when a woman with a large basket, a key on her little finger, a bonnet half off her head disclosing a broad, sallow, wrinkled face, came shuffling into the shop.

Mattie looked at her across the counter, and waited for orders—looked till her heart began beating unpleasantly fast. Back from the land benighted came a rush of old memories at the sight of that dirty, slipshod woman, whom she had hoped never to see again.

"And so you recollects me, Mattie, arter all these years?"

"I—I think that I have seen you before."

"I should think you just had, once or twice. And so you're minding this shop for the Wesdens, who's turned gentlefolks?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well," putting her basket on the counter, and taking the one chair that was placed for the convenience of customers, "wonders will never cease. To think that you should find a place like this, and should have stuck to it so long, and never gone traipsing about the streets again."

"Can I serve you with any thing?" asked Mattie.

"No, you can't. I never deal here."

"Then what do you want?"

"Ah! that's another wonder which won't cease either, my dear," said the old woman, assuming an insinuating manner, "and a bigger wonder than the tother one."

"I don't want to hear it, I don't want any thing to say to you. You must go out of the shop, Mrs. Watts."

"Don't be afeard of me, my love; the Lord knows I haven't been a trouble to you, though I've lived within a stone's throw, and could have dropped in here at any moment. But no, I says, let her keep to her fine stuck-up people if she likes, and forget her oldest and best friends for

em, and do her wust, it's not the likes of me or mine who'll poke our noses into her affairs. No, I says, let her keep a lady, and wear brown meriner dresses, and smart black aprons, and white collars and cuffs, for me!"

Mrs. Watts had verged into the acrimonious vein, taken stock of Mattie's general appearance at that juncture, and introduced it into her conversation with an ease and fluency that was remarkable.

Mattie stood watching her. This was the evil genius of her early life, and there was danger in her very presence. It was not safe to take her eyes from her.

"What do you want?" she asked again.

"It's somethin' partickler—shall we come into the parlor?"

"Oh no!"

"I'm not well dressed ennf, I s'pose?—I'm not fit society for sich a nice young gal, I s'pose?—I'm to be turned off as if I was a beggar, instead of the woman of property which I am, I s'pose?"

"What do you want?" repeated Mattie.

"And I was your poor mother's friend, and trusted her when nobody else would, and gave her a bed to die on comfortably when there wasn't a mag to be made out of her. And I was your friend, though that's something to turn your nose up at, ain't it?"

"You were kind in your way, perhaps. I can not say, I don't know; I don't wish to remember the past any more. Will you tell me what you want, or go away?"

"And you won't come into the parlor?"

"No."

"It's the curiest story as you ever did hear. There's been a man asking arter you down our court, and asking arter me, and finding me out at last, and nearly coming to a bargain with me, when, cus my greediness, I lost him."

"Asking after me?"

"Ah! you may well open those black eyes of yours; he made me stare, I can tell you. He walks one day into my house, as if it belonged to him, and says, 'Are you Mrs. Watts?' 'Yes,' I says. 'Do you remember Mrs. Gray?' he says. 'Not by name,' I says. 'She was a tramp,' he says, 'and died here.' 'Oh!' I says, 'if it's her you mean, whose name I never knowed or cared about, died here, she did.' 'And the child?' he says. 'Mattie you mean,' I says. 'Ah! Mattie,' he says. And then I says, thinking it was a dodge, my dear, for the perlice are up to all manner of tricks, and you mightn't have been going on the square, and been wanted—then I says, 'And will you oblige me with your reasons for all these questions of a 'spectable and hard-working woman?' I says. 'My name's Gray,' he says, 'and I'm Mattie's father.'"

"Is this true? oh! is it really true?"

"Hopemaydropdead, my dear, if it isn't," Mrs. Watts remarked, running her words into each other in the volubility of her protestation; "hopemayneverstiragainfromhere, if 'tisn't, Miss Gray! 'Mattie's father,' I says. 'Yes,' he says; 'is that so very wonderful?' And I says, 'Yes it is, arter all this time ago.' And then he asks all manner of questions, which I didn't see the good of answering, and so was werry ignorant, my dear, until he said he'd give me a suverin to find you out. I says, 'I'd try for a five-pun

note, for you was a long way off, and it'd be a trouble to look arter you.' And he says, 'I'll take that trouble,' and I didn't see the pull of that, knowing he was anxious like, and fancying that five pounds wouldn't ruin him, so I held out. And then he looked at his watch, and said he'd come again, which he never did, as I'm an honest ooman."

"How long was this ago?"

"Two months."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"Oh! a little ugly bloke enough—not too well dressed. Your father won't turn out to be a duke or markis, if he ever turns up agin and brings me my five pounds."

"But you will not tell him where I live? He may be a bad, cruel man. My mother ran away from him because he treated her ill, I have heard her say. Oh! don't tell him where I live. I am happy and contented here."

Mrs. Watts brightened up with a new idea.

"You must make it a five-pun note, then, instead of him, and I'll tell him I can't find yer when he comes back to take you home with him. You've saved money, I dare say, by this time, and five pounds ain't much to stand."

Mattie recovered her composure when it came to the money test; there was a motive for Mrs. Watts's appearance there, she thought: after all, it was an idle story, a foolish scheme to extort money, which Mattie saw through now.

"I shall not give you any money—not five-pence, Mrs. Watts."

"Leave it alone, then," was the sharp reply; "you can't leave here, and I'll bring him to you, if he ever comes agin. I didn't come to get money out of yer, but to keep my eye upon you for your father's sake. And you'll never take a step away from this place, right or left, but what I'll know it; there's too many on us about here for you to steal away."

"I do not intend to steal away," cried Mattie.

"And considerin' that I've come out of kindness, and to give you a piece of news, you might have said thankee for it—bad luck to you, Mattie Gray."

"Oh! bad luck will not come to me at your wish."

The old woman paused at the door, and shook her key at her.

"I never wished bad luck to any living soul but what it came. Now think of that!"

She went out of the shop and along Great Suffolk Street at a smart pace—like a woman who had suddenly remembered something and started off in a hurry after it. Mattie was perplexed at the interview; doubtful if any truth had mixed itself with Mrs. Watts's statement, and at a loss to reconcile all that she had heard with fabrication. Even from Mrs. Watts's lips it sounded like truth; the woman seemed in earnest, her offer to take five pounds for her silence an impromptu thought, originated by Mattie's sudden fear.

"What can it mean?—what can it mean?" reiterated Mattie to herself. "Was it unfair to doubt her? She thought so, or she would not have wished me bad luck so evilly at the last."

She sat down behind the counter to reflect upon the strangeness of the incident, and was still revolving in her mind the facts or falsities connected with it, when Ann Packet burst from

the parlor door into the shop, with eyes distended.

"Have you been up stairs, Mattie?"

"Up stairs, Ann!—no."

"Have you been asleep?"

"No."

"O lor!—quite sure—not a moment!"

"No—no—what has happened?"

"Somebody's been up stairs into all the rooms, into yourn, too, where the money's put for Mr. Wesden—and—broken open the drawer."

"And the cash-box that I keep there?"

"Open, and empty!"

Mattie dropped again into the chair from which she had risen at the appearance of Ann Packet, and struggled with a sense of faintness which came over her. The bad luck that Mrs. Watts had wished had soon stolen on its way toward her.

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE VISITORS TO GREAT SUFFOLK STREET.

MATTIE guessed the plan by which the robbery had been effected, and at which Mrs. Watts had connived. Her attention had been distracted by the story that had been fabricated for the purpose, and then the accomplice, on his hands and knees, had stolen, snake-like, toward the door opening on the stairs, and made short work with every thing of value to be found in the upper floors. What was to be done? What would Mr. Wesden say, he who had never had a robbery committed on his premises during all the long years of his business life, thanks to his carefulness and watchfulness? What would he think of her? Would he believe that she had paid common attention to the shop he had left in trust to her, to be robbed in the broad noon-day? What should she do? wait till the shop was closed, and then set forth for Camberwell with the bad news, or start at once, leaving Ann Packet in charge, or wait till Mr. Hinchford came home, and ask him to be the mediator?

While revolving these plans of action in her mind the proprietor of the establishment, wearied of his country retirement, walked into the shop.

"Oh, Sir, something has happened very dreadful!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Wesden began to stare over her head at this salutation.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Some one has been up stairs this afternoon, broken open the drawers and the cash-box, and taken the money, eight pounds nine shillings and six-pence, Sir."

Mr. Wesden sat down in the chair formerly occupied by Mrs. Watts, and tried to arrange his ideas; he stared over Mattie's head harder than ever; he held his own head between his hands, taking off his hat especially for that purpose, and placing it on the counter.

"Money taken out of this house?"

"Yes."

"At this time of day! Where were you, Mattie?"

"In the shop, sitting here, I believe."

"Then they came in at the back, I suppose?"

"No, in the front, while Mrs. Watts was talking to me."

"What Mrs. Watts? Not the woman—"

"Yes, yes, the woman who would have tempted me to evil years ago; she came into the shop this afternoon, and said that my father—as if I'd ever had one, Sir!—had been inquiring for me in Kent Street."

"This is a curious story," muttered "Mr. Wesden.

He put on his hat and went up stairs. It was half an hour or an hour before he reappeared, looking very grave and stern.

"They didn't come in at the back of the house—I can't make it out—eight pounds nine and six-pence is a heavy loss—I'll speak to the policeman."

Mr. Wesden went in search of a policeman, and presently returned with two members of the official force, with whom he went up stairs, and with whom he remained some time. After a while Mr. Hinchford, senior, came home, heard the tidings, went into his room, and discovered a little money missing also, besides a watch-chain which he had left at home that day for security's sake, a link having snapped, and repairs being necessary.

Mr. Wesden and the policemen came down stairs and put many questions to Mattie and Ann Packet; finally the policemen departed, and Mr. Wesden very gravely walked about the shop, and paid but little attention to Mattie's expressions of regret.

"It's my carelessness, Sir, and I hope you'll let me make it up. I've been saving money, Sir, lately, thanks to you."

"Well, you can't say fairer than that, Mattie," he responded to this suggestion; "I'll think about that, and let you know to-morrow."

He never let Mattie know his determination, or seemed inclined to dwell upon the subject again. The robbery became a forbidden topic, and drifted slowly away from the present. But it was an event that saddened Mattie; for she could read that Mr. Wesden had formed his own ideas of its occurrence, and she tortured herself with the fear that he might suspect her. She had gained his confidence only to lose it; her antecedents were dark enough, and if he did not believe all that she had told him then he must doubt if she were the proper person to manage the place in his absence.

He said nothing; he suggested no alteration; but he came more frequently to business; and he was altered in his manner toward her.

Mattie was right—he suspected her; he thought he kept his suspicions to himself, for amidst the new distrust rose ever before him the past struggles of the girl in her faithful service to him, and he was not an uncharitable man. But the police had seconded his doubts; the story was an unlikely one, Mattie had been a bad character, and, above all, Mrs. Watts, upon inquiry, had not lived in Kent Street or parts adjacent for the last three years. However, his better nature would not misjudge implicitly, although a shadow of distrust was between him and Mattie from that day forth. He said nothing to Harriet or his wife, but he seldom asked Mattie to his house at Camberwell now; he came more frequently for his money, and looked more closely after his stock; he had a habit of turning into the shop at unreasonable hours and taking her by surprise there.

Mattie bore with this for a while—for two or three months, perhaps—then her out-spoken nature faced Mr. Wesden one evening.

"You've got a bad thought in your head against me, Sir."

Thus taxed, Mr. Wesden answered in the negative. Looking at her fearless face, and her bright eyes that so steadily met his, he had not the heart or the courage to confess it.

"I'd rather go away than you should think that; go away and leave you all forever. I know," she added, very sorrowfully and humbly, "that my past life isn't a fair prospect to look back upon, and that it stands between you and your trust in me at this time."

"No, Mattie."

"If you doubt me—"

"If I believed that you were not acting fairly by me, I should not have you here an hour," he said.

He was carried away by Mattie's earnestness; he forgot his new harshness, which he had inherited with his change of life; before him stood the girl who had nursed his wife through a long illness, and he could not believe in her ingratitude toward him. After that charge and refutation, Mattie and Mr. Wesden were on better terms with each other; the robbery, the visit of Mrs. Watts, appeared all parts of a bad dream, difficult to shake off, but in the reality of which it was hard to believe. And yet it was all a terrible truth, too, and the story, true or false, of Mrs. Watts, late of Kent Street, had left its impression on Mattie, deep and ineffaceable; she could almost believe that from the shadowy past some stranger, cruel and villainous, would step forth to claim her.

Meantime the course of Sidney Hinchford's true love flowed on peacefully. He was happy enough now. With the hope of Harriet Wesden for a wife he became more energetic than ever in business; possibly even a young man less abrupt to his companions in office; for the tender passion softens the heart wonderfully. He was more kind and less brusque in his manner. To Mattie he had been always kind, but she fancied that even she could detect a different and more gentle way with him.

When he returned from Camberwell—Mr. Wesden always shut him out at early hours—he generally brought some message from Harriet to the old half-friend and confidante, and at times would loiter about the shop talking of Harriet to Mattie, and sure of her sympathy with all that he said and did.

On one of the latter occasions, about six in the evening, he remarked,

"When Harriet and I are grand enough to have a large house of our own—for we can't tell what may happen—I shall ask you to be our housekeeper, Mattie."

Mattie's face brightened up; it had been rather a sad face of late, and Sidney Hinchford had observed it, and been puzzled at the reason. The story of the robbery had not affected him much.

"Oh! then I'll pray night and day for the big house, Mr. Sidney," she said, with her usual readiness of reply.

"Why, Mattie, are you tired of shop-keeping?"

"At times I am," she answered. "I don't

know why. I don't see how to get on and feel happy. It's rather lonely here."

"You dissatisfied, Mattie! Why, I have always regarded you as the very picture of content."

"I'm not dissatisfied exactly; don't tell any one that, or they'll think I'm ungrateful for all the kindness that has been shown me, and all the confidence that has been placed in me. You, Mr. Hinchford, must not think I'm ungrateful or discontented."

"Perhaps you're ambitious, Mattie," he said, jestingly, "now you've mastered all the lessons which I used to set you, and can read and write as well as most of us."

"I don't exactly understand the true meaning of ambition," said Mattie. "I'm no scholar, you know. Is it a wish to get on in the world?"

"Partly."

"I'm not ambitious. I wouldn't be a lady for the world. I would rather be of service to some one I love than see those I love working and toiling for my sake. But then they must love me, and have faith in me, or I'm—I'm done for!"

Mattie had dropped, as was her habit when excited, into one of her old phrases; but its meaning was apparent, and Sidney Hinchford understood it.

"Something's on your mind, Mattie. Can I punch any body's head for you?"

"No, thank you. But you can remember the promise about the housekeeper when you're a rich man."

Like Sidney's father, she accepted Sidney's coming greatness as a thing of course, concerning which no doubts need be entertained.

He laughed.

"It's a promise, mind. Good-night, Mattie."

"Good-night."

That night was to be marked by another variation of the day's monotony—by more than one. It was striking seven from St. George's Church, Southwark, when a stately carriage and pair dashed up Great Suffolk Street, and drew up at the stationer's door. A few moments afterward a tall, white-haired old gentleman entered the shop leaning upon the arm of a good-looking young man, and advanced toward the counter.

The likeness of the elder man was so apparent to that of old Mr. Hinchford up stairs, that Mattie fancied it was he for an instant, until her rapid observation detected that the gentleman before her was much thinner, wore higher shirt-collars, had a voluminous frill to his shirt, and a double gold eye-glass in his hand.

"Thank you, that will do. I won't trouble you any further."

"Shall I wait here?"

"No, my boy—don't let me keep you from your club engagements. If you are behind time take the carriage."

"No, no—not so selfish as that, Sir. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The good-looking young man did not wait to see the result of his father's mission; he glanced for a moment at Mattie, and then took his departure, leaving the stately old gentleman confronting her at the counter.

"This is Mr. Wesden's, stationer, I believe?" he asked, surveying Mattie through his glasses.

"Yes, Sir."

"A Mr. Hinchford lives here?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Is he within?"

"Not the old gentleman, I believe, Sir."

"As I have not come hither to base my hopes of an interview on the belief of a black-eyed shop-girl, will you be kind enough to inquire?"

The old gentleman sat down and loosened the gilt clasp of a long cloak which he wore—an old-fashioned, oddly cut black elcloak, with a cape to it.

Mattie forgot the likeness which this gentleman bore to the lodger up stairs, lost her impression of the carriage at the door, and thought of Mrs. Watts and the hundred tricks of London thieves. She began thumping with her heels on the floor, until she quite shook up the old gentleman on the other side of the counter.

"What's that for, my child?" he asked.

"That'll bring up the servant—I never leave the shop."

The gentleman closed his glasses, and rapped upon the counter with them, in rather an amused manner.

"By Jupiter Tonans, that's amusing! She thinks I am going to make off with the stationery," he said, more to himself than Mattie.

Ann Packet, round-eyed and wondering as usual, looked over the parlor blind. Mattie beckoned to her, and she opened the parlor-door.

"Run up and tell Mr. Sidney that a gentleman wishes to see his father. Is he to wait, or to call again?"

"I think I might answer that question better myself—stay."

The slim old gentleman very slowly and deliberately searched for his card-case, produced it, and drew forth a card.

"Present that to Mr. Sidney, and say that the bearer is desirous of an interview."

Ann Packet took the card in her great red hand, turned it over, looked from it to the owner, gave vent to an idiotic "Lor!" and then trudged up stairs with the card. Mattie and the old gentleman, meanwhile, continued to regard each other—the suspicions of the former not perfectly allayed yet.

Ann Packet returned, appearing by the staircase door this time.

"Mr. Sidney Hinchford will see you, Sir—if your business is of importance, he says."

The gentleman addressed compressed his lips—very thin lips they became on the instant—but deigned no reply. He rose from his chair, and followed Ann through the door, up stairs toward Mr. Hinchford's room, leaving his hat on the counter, where he had very politely placed it upon entering the shop.

Mattie put it behind her, and then scowled down a lackadaisical footman, who was simpering at her between a *Family Herald* and a portrait of T. P. Cooke.

The stranger followed Ann Packet up stairs, and entered the room on the first-floor, glancing sharply round him through his glasses, and taking a survey of every thing which it contained on the instant. There was a fire burning in the grate that autumn night; the gas was lighted;

the tea things ready on the table; at a smaller table by the window, working by the light of a table-lamp adorned with a green shade, and with another green shade tied across his forehead by way of extra protection for the eyes he worked so mercilessly, sat Sidney Hinchford, the only occupant of the room.

Sidney rose, bowed slightly, pointed to a chair with the feather of his pen, then sat down again, and looked at his visitor from under the ugly shade, which cast his face into shadow.

The gentleman bowed also, and took the seat indicated, keeping his gold-rimmed glasses on his nose.

"You are my brother James's son, I presume?"

"The same, Sir."

"You are surprised to see me here?"

"Yes, Sir—now."

"Why now?" was the quick question that followed like the snap of a trigger.

"Years and years ago, when I was a lad, I fancied that you might visit here, and make an effort to bridge over an ugly gulf, Sir."

"Years and years ago, young man, I had too much upon my mind, and, it was just possible, more pride in my heart than to make the first advances."

"You were the richer man—and you had done the wrong."

"Wrong, Sir!" replied the other; "there was no wrong done that I am aware of. I was a man careful of my money, and your father was a man improvident with his. Was it wrong to object to an alliance?"

"I have but a dim knowledge of the story, Sir. My father does not care to dwell upon it."

"I will tell it you."

The old gentleman drew his chair nearer to Sidney; the young man held up his hand.

"Pardon me, but I have no desire to hear it. Were I to press my father, I could learn it from his own lips. Please state the object of your coming hither."

"To make the first advances in the latter days that have come to him and me," he said; "can I say more? To help him if he be in distress—and to assist his son if he find the world hard to cope with. It is a romantic appearance, a romantic penitence if you will, for not allowing your father to spend my money as well as his own," he added, with a slight curl of the lip, which turned Sidney suddenly against him; "but it is an effort to bridge over the gulf to which you have recently alluded."

"I fear my father will not thank you for the effort," was the cold reply; "and for the help which you would offer now I can answer for his refusal."

"Ah! he was always a proud fellow, and blind to his own interest," was the quiet observation here; "his friends laughed at his pride, and traded in his weakness before you were born."

"He has one friend living who respects them now, Sir."

"His son, I presume?"

"His son, Sir."

"I am glad that his son is so high-spirited; but he will find that amiable feeling rather in the way of his advancement."

"No, Sir; I think not."

Mr. Hinchford regarded Sidney very closely; he did not appear put out by the young man's retorts, and he was pleased at the effect that his own satire had upon him.

"Well," he said at last, "I have not come to quarrel with my nephew—I am here as a peace-maker, and, lo! the son starts up with all the father's old obstinacies. Your name is Sidney, I believe."

"Yes, Sir."

"Sidney Hinchford, then," said he, "if you be a man of the world—which I fancy you are—you will not turn your back on your own interests for the sake of the grudge which my unforgiving brother may owe me. That's not the way of the world, unless it's the world of silly novel-writers and poets."

"Sir, this sudden interest in my father and myself is somewhat unaccountable."

"Granted," was the cool response.

"Still, let me for my father and myself thank you," said Sidney, with a graceful dignity that sat well upon him; "thank you for this sudden offer, which I, for both, must unhesitatingly decline."

"Indeed!"

"We are not rich, you can see," Sidney said, with a comprehensive sweep of his hand; "but we have managed to exist without getting into debt, and I believe that the worst struggle is over with us both."

"Upon what supposition do you base this theory?"

"No matter, Mr. Hinchford, my belief is strong, and I would not deprive myself of the pleasure of saying that I worked on with my father to the higher ground without the help of those rich relations who would at the eleventh hour have taken the credit to themselves."

"You are a remarkable young man."

"Sir, you come too late here," said Sidney, with no small amount of energy; "we bear you no ill-will, but we will not have your help now. If you and yours forgot my father in his adversity, if you made no sign when he was troubled by my mother's death, if you held aloof when assistance and sympathy would have made amends for the old breach between you, if you turned your backs upon him and shut him from your thoughts then, now we repudiate your service, and prefer to work our way alone!"

"Well, well, be it so," said his uncle; "it is heroic, but it is bad policy, more especially in you, a young man who will have to fight hard for a competence. You will excuse this whim of mine."

"I have already thanked you for the good intention."

"I did not anticipate encountering so hard and dogmatic a disposition as your own, but I do not regret the visit."

Sidney looked at his watch, fidgeted with the feather of his pen, but made no remark to this.

"We will say it was a whim—you will please to inform your father that this was simply a whim of mine—the impulse of a moment, after an extra glass of port-wine with my dessert."

"I will think so, if you wish it."

"You perceive that I am an old man—your father's senior by eight years—and old people do get whimsical and childish, when the iron in their nerves melts, by some unaccountable proc-

ess, away from them. Possibly this is not the first time that it has struck me that my brother James and I might easily arrive at a better appreciation of each other's character if we sat down quietly face to face, two old men as we have become. The sarcasm that wounded him, and the passionate impulse that irritated me, would have grown less with our white hairs, I think. I don't know for certain—I can not answer for a man who always would take the wrong side of an argument, and stick to it. By Gad! how tightly he would stick to it!"

The old gentleman rapped his gold-headed cane on the floor, and indulged in a little sharp laugh, not unpleasant to hear. Sidney repressed a smile, and looked significantly at his watch again.

"You wish me gone, young Sir," said his uncle.

"Candidly, I see no good result to arise from your stay. My father is of an excitable disposition, and, I am sorry to say, neither so strong nor so well as I could wish. I fear the shock would be too much for him."

"I will take the hint," he said, rising; "I hate scenes, and if there is likely to be a second edition of those covert reproaches with which you have favored me, why, it is best to withdraw as gracefully as possible under the circumstances. You will tell him that I have called?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You will tell him also—bear this in mind instead of sucking your pen, will you?—that if he owe me no ill-will, he will call on me next—that it is *his* turn! I never ask a man twice for any thing, except for the money he may owe me," he added, dryly.

"I will deliver your message, Mr. Hinchford."

"Then I have the honor, Sir, to apologize for this intrusion, and to wish you a good-evening."

He crossed the room and held out a thin white hand to Sidney, looking very strangely, very intently at him meanwhile. Sidney placed his own within it, almost instinctively, and the two Hinchfords shook hands.

They parted; Sidney thought that he had finally taken his departure when the door opened, and he reappeared.

"Do you mind showing me a light?—it's a cork-screw staircase, leading to the bottomless pit, to all appearances."

Sidney seized the table-lamp, and proceeded to the top of the stairs, which his uncle descended in a slow and gingerly manner. At the first landing he looked up, and said:

"That will do, thank you—remember, *his* turn next—good-evening."

Sidney went back to the room, and shortly afterward Mr. Hinchford, the great banker, the owner of princely estates in three counties, was whirled away westward in his carriage.

CHAPTER III.

SIDNEY'S SUGGESTION.

WHEN Mr. Hinchford returned home Sidney related the particulars of the strange visit that he had received, and from the effect which the news produced on his father was grateful for the thought which had prompted him to request his

uncle's departure. Sidney had noticed with sadness lately that his father was easily disturbed, easily affected, and it was satisfactory to know that it had been judicious on his part to advise his uncle's retirement.

Mr. Hinchford tugged at his stock, held his temples, passed his hands through his scanty hair, puffed and blowed, dropped his first cup of tea over his knees, and did not subside into a moderate state of calmness for at least a quarter of an hour after the story had been told.

"And so brother Geoffrey turns up at last! Well, I thought he would."

Sidney looked with amazement at his father.

"He would have turned up years ago, I dare say, if it hadn't been for his wife—she and I never agreed; but old steady, quiet Geoffrey, why, when we were boys, we were the best of friends."

"You certainly surprise me, father. Perhaps I have done wrong in persuading him to depart. But I always understood that it had been a desperate quarrel between you, and that you had almost taken an oath never to speak to him again."

"That's all true enough, and it was a desperate quarrel, and he was tight-fisted just then, and let me drift into bankruptcy rather than help me. It wasn't brotherly, and I'll never forgive him—never. How was the rascal looking, Sid?"

"Like a spare likeness of yourself, Sir."

"He's taller than I am by a good two inches. We used to cut notches in the sides of all the doors when we were boys; comparing notes, we called it. I suppose he's very much altered?"

"Well, never having seen him before, it is difficult to say. But I have no doubt that there's a difference in him since you met last."

"Let me see—it's five-and-twenty years ago, come next February. Twenty-five years to nurse a quarrel, and bear enmity in one's heart against him! What a time!"

"He was anxious to tell me the story of that quarrel, Sir, but I declined to listen to it."

"I hope you weren't rude."

"Oh no, Sir!"

"You have a most unpleasant habit of blurring out any thing that comes uppermost. That's your great failing, Sid."

"I like to speak out, Sir."

"And after all, perhaps if we had spoken out less—he and I—we should not have been all these years at arm's-length, and you might have been the better for that. There's no telling, things turn out so strangely. And it wasn't so much his refusal to lend me, his only brother, ten thousand pounds—ten drops of water to him—but the way in which he refused, the bitterness of his words, the gall and wormwood instead of brotherly sympathy. I was half mad with my losses, and he stung me with his cool and insolent taunts, and cast me off to beggary; Sid, would you forgive that?"

Mr. Hinchford had realized the scene again; through the mists of five-and-twenty years it shone forth vividly; his cheek flushed, and his hand smote the table heavily, and made the tea things jump again.

Sidney cooled him by a few words.

"He has been cautious with his money, and you might have shown signs of being reckless with yours, at that time. Possibly you both

were heated, and said more than you intended. It don't appear to me to have been a very serious affair, after all."

"Did he ever seek me out again, or care whether I was alive or dead, until to-day? was that kind?"

"Did you ever seek him out?"

"He was the rich man, and I the poor, Sid."

"Ah! that makes a difference!"

"What would you have done?" he asked, anxiously.

"Kept away; not because it was right or polite, but because I inherit my father's pride."

"It's an odd legacy, Sid," remarked the father, mournfully.

"I told him to-night we did not care about his patronage, and could work our way in the world—that at so late an hour, when the worst was over, we would prefer to thank ourselves for the result. I don't say that I was right, father," he added; "but there was a satisfaction in saying so, and in showing that we did not jump at any favor he might think it friendly to concede."

"You're a brave lad," remarked the father, relapsing into thought again; "and perhaps it is as well to show we don't care for him. He talked about my turn next, you say?"

"Yes."

"That means, that he'll never come here again, or make another effort to be friends. Oh! he's as hard as iron when he says a thing, Sid."

"Shall I tell you what I have thought, Sir? it goes against the foolish oath you took, but I think you'll be forgiven for it."

"What have you thought?" he asked, with eagerness.

"That it shall be our turn some day—some early day, I hope—to visit him, and say: 'We are in a good position in life, and above all help, shall we be friends again?'"

"To walk into his counting-house and surprise him?" cried the father; "for me to say: 'I owe all to my son's energy and cleverness, and can afford to face you, without being suspected of wanting your money.' Well, we ought to bear and forbear; I don't think it would be so very hard to make it up with him!"

It was a subject that discomposd Mr. Hinchford, that kept him restless and disturbed. His son detected this, and brushed all the papers into a heap, thrust them into the recesses of his desk, and began hunting about for the backgammon board. The past had been ever a subject kept in the back-ground, and of late years his father had not seemed capable of hearing any news, good or bad, with a fair semblance of composure. The change in him had been a matter of regret with Sidney; far off in the distance, perhaps, there might loom a great trouble for him—he almost fancied so at times. Meanwhile, there were troubles nearer than that fancied one—man is born unto them, as the sparks fly upward.

CHAPTER IV.

PERPLEXITY.

HARRIET WESDEN had spoken more than once to Mattie of the Eveleighs, a family which plays no part in these pages, although, from Harriet's

knowledge of it, every after-page of this story will be influenced. A Miss Eveleigh, an only daughter, and a spoiled one, had been a school-fellow of Harriet's; an intimacy had existed between them in the old days, and when school-days were ended for good, a correspondence was kept up, which resulted, eventually, in flying visits to each other's houses—the house in Camberwell, and Miss Eveleigh's residence at New Cross.

Harriet, during the last week or two, had been spending her time at New Cross with the Eveleighs, much to the desolateness of the Camberwell domicile, and the dullness of Master Sidney Hinchford. But the visit was at an end on the morning of the day alluded to in our last chapter, and had it not been for his father's excitability, Sidney, who had mapped his plans out, would have abandoned the backgammon board and a wooing gone.

It was as well that he did not, for Harriet Wesden at half past seven in the evening entered the stationer's shop, and surprised Mattie by her late visit.

"Good gracious!" was Mattie's truly feminine ejaculation, "who would have thought of seeing you to-night? How well you are looking—how glad I am that you have come back—what a color you have got!"

"Have I?" she said; "ah! it's the sharp frost that's in the streets to-night. Let me deliver father's message, and hurry back before he gets fidgety about me."

Harriet Wesden and Mattie went into the parlor, Mattie taking up her position by the door, so as to command the approach from the street, Harriet sitting by the fire with her head against the chimney-piece. The message was delivered, sundry little account-books were wanted at once, and Harriet was to take them back with her; Mattie had to find them in the shop, and make them up into a little parcel for our heroine.

When she returned, Harriet was in the same position, staring very intently at the fire.

"Is any thing the matter?" asked our heroine.

"Oh no!—what should be the matter, dear?"

"You're very thoughtful, and it's not exactly your look, Miss Harriet."

"Fancies again, Mattie," remarked Harriet; "I'm only a little tired, having walked from Camberwell."

"I hope you'll not walk back—it's getting late. Unless," she added, archly, "Mr. Sidney up stairs is to see you safely home. That must be one of the nicest parts of courtship, to go arm in arm together about the streets—to feel yourself safe with him at your side."

Harriet's thoughtful demeanor vanished; she gave a merry laugh at the gravity with which Mattie delivered this statement, taunted Mattie with having thoughts of a lover running in her head, darted from that subject to the pleasant fortnight she had been spending with the Eveleighs at New Cross, detailed the particulars of her visit, the people to whom she had been introduced, and lively little incidents connected with them—finally caught up her parcel and bade Mattie good-night.

"Ah! you'll wait till I call down Mr. Sidney, I'm sure."

"He'll think that I have called for him. No, I'm going home alone to-night."

"Why, what will he say?"

"Tell him that I was in a hurry, going home by omnibus to save time, and appease father's nervousness about me. I will not have any dangles in my train to-night. I'm in a bad temper—nervous, irritable, and excitable; I shall only offend him."

"Then something has—"

"Good-night, Mattie—oh! I had nearly forgotten to ask you to dine with us on Sunday; you'll be sure to come early?"

"Who told you to say that?"

"Why, my father to be sure."

"I'm glad of it; I'm glad he thinks better of me," Mattie cried; "oh! Miss Harriet, you don't know how miserable I have been in my heart, lest he—lest he has thought differently of me lately!"

"More fancies! I have always said that they were fancies, Mattie."

"Ah! I guess pretty near the truth sometimes."

"And tease yourself with a false idea more often; why, you will imagine that I shall think differently of you presently."

"No, I don't think you will."

"Never, Mattie."

"God bless you for that! If ever I'm in trouble I shall look to you to defend me."

"And in my trouble, Mattie?" was the halflaughing rejoinder.

"I'll think of you only, fight for you against all your enemies—die for you, if it will do any good. Oh! Miss Harriet, you are growing up a lady very far above me, getting out of my reach like; you won't forget the little girl you were kind to, and shut her wholly from your heart?"

Harriet Wesden was touched; ever a sensitive girl, the sight of another's sorrow struck home. She went back a step or two into the parlor.

"This isn't like the old Mattie," she said, "the Mattie who always looked at the brightest side of life, and made the best of every difficulty. Is that silly affair of the robbery still preying on your mind?"

"On your father's, perhaps, not on mine."

"Then I'll fight the battle for you to begin with; if there be really one doubt in my father's heart I'll charge it from its hiding-place to-night. Perhaps I have been wrapped up too much lately in my own selfish thoughts when I might have helped you, Mattie. Will you forgive me?"

She stooped and kissed Mattie, whose arms closed round her for a minute with a loving clasp.

"I'm better now," said Mattie. "It was fancy, perhaps—a fancy that you, too, were going further away from me, perhaps thinking ill of me. For you were cold and distant when you came here first to-night."

"No, no."

"Well, that was my fancy, too, it's very likely. I'll say good-night now, for it's getting late."

"Good-night, then."

At the door she paused and returned.

"Mattie, put on your bonnet and come with me to the end of the street where the omnibus passes. I'm nervous to-night—I don't care to walk alone about these streets again."

"Let me call Mr. Sid—"

"No, no; you—not him!" she interrupted.

"I never leave the shop, Miss Harriet; it's my trust, and your father would not like it. Shall Ann—"

"Oh! it does not matter much; you have only made me nervous. I'm very wrong to seek to take you from the business, and father so particular and fidgety. I dare say no one will fly away with me. Good-night, my dear."

She went away with a bright smile at her own nervousness. That was the last gleam of brightness there for a while.

After that there settled on her face a confused expression, often a sad, always a thoughtful one, with a long look ahead, as it were from the depths of her blue eyes. From that night there was a change in her; Mattie, quick of observation, was the first to detect it. It was a face of trouble, and Mattie, seeing it now and then, could note the shadows deepen. Sidney observed it next, detected with a lover's jealous scrutiny a difference in her manner toward him, a something new which was colder and less friendly, and yet not demonstrative enough for him to murmur against, even if his half engagement had permitted him.

He asked her once if he had offended her, and she replied in the negative, and was kinder toward him for that night; but the reserve, indifference, coldness, or whatever it was, came back, and perplexed Sidney Hinchford more than he cared to own. The year of his novitiate was approaching to an end, and he thought that he could afford to wait till then; she was not tiring of him and his attentions, he had too good an opinion of himself to believe that; at times he solaced himself with the idea that she was reflecting on the gravity of the next step, that formal engagement to be married in the future to him.

Mattie and Sidney were both observers of some power, for after all they saw through the bright side—the forced side—of her. For the father and mother was reserved Harriet Wesden with her mask off.

Fathers and mothers are strangely blind to the causes of their daughters' ailments; this humble pair formed no exception to the rule. They were perplexed with her fits of brooding, her forced efforts to rally when taxed with them, her pallor, loss of appetite, red eyes, and restless looks in the morning. Mr. Wesden, a suspicious man to the world in general, was the most trustful and simple as regarded his daughter; he did not know the depth of his love for her until she began to look ill, and then he almost worried her into a real illness by his suggestions and anxiety.

Mr. and Mrs. Wesden had many secret confabulations concerning the change in Harriet; pottering over a hundred fusty ideas, with never a thought as to the true one.

Was Camberwell disagreeing with her? was the house damp, or her room badly situated? had not the dear girl change enough, society enough? what was the matter? Mr. Wesden set it down for "a low way"—an unaccountable complaint from which people suffer at times, and for which change of scene is good.

So he set to work studying the matter, originating small excursions for the day, submitting

her to the healthy excitement of the winter course of lectures at the infant schools in the vicinity—lectures on artificial memory, on hydrostatics with experiments, on the poets with experiments also, and unaccountable ones they were—even once ventured into a box at the Surrey Theatre, and began to flatter himself and wife that at last Harriet was rapidly improving.

But Harriet Wesden was only learning rapidly to disguise that “something” which was perplexing her more and more with every day; learning to subdue her parents’ anxiety, and sinking a little deeper all the new thoughts. But the whirl of events brought the secret uppermost, and betrayed her; she was forced to make a confidante, and she thought of Mattie, who had always loved her, and stood her friend; Mattie, in whom she was sure was the only one she could trust.

The confidence was placed suddenly, and at a time when Mattie was scarcely prepared for it—Mattie who yet, by some strange instinct, had been patiently waiting for it.

“I believe when that girl’s in trouble she will come to me,” Mattie thought, “for she knows I would do any thing to serve her. Have any one to love except her in the world? is there any one who requires so much love to keep her, what I call, strong?”

Mattie had seen that Harriet Wesden was not strong—that she was tender-hearted, affectionate, and weak—that there were times when she might give way without a strong heart and a stout hand to assist her. She had been a weak, impulsive, passionate child; she had grown up a woman very different to Mattie, whose firmness, and even hardness, had made Harriet wonder more than once. And Mattie had often wondered at Harriet in her turn—at her vanity and romantic ideas, and made excuses for her, as we all do for those we love very dearly. She had even feared for her, until the half engagement with Sidney Hinchford had taken place, and then she had noticed that Harriet had become more staid and womanly, and was glad in her heart that it had happened thus.

Then finally and suddenly the last change swept over the surface of things; all the worse for our characters perhaps, but infinitely better for our story, which takes a new lease of life from this page.

CHAPTER V.

MR. WESDEN TURNS ECCENTRIC.

THE nights “drew in” more and more; and nearer and nearer with the shortest day approached the end of Sidney Hinchford’s probation. Only a week or two between the final explanations of Sid’s position—of his chances in the future perhaps—every thing very quiet and still at Suffolk Street and Camberwell—a deceptive calm before the storm that was brewing.

Harriet Wesden called more frequently at the stationer’s shop; she was glad to escape from the long evenings at home, and the watchful, ever-anxious eyes of her father, and it was easy to frame an excuse to repair to Great Suffolk Street. Occasionally Sidney Hinchford knew of her propinquity, and escorted her home—more

often missed his chances of a *tête-à-tête*—three or four times, and greatly to his annoyance, crossed her in the journey, and reached Camberwell to spend the evening with a fidgety old man and his invalid spouse.

At this time it also happened that Sidney Hinchford fell into a dreamy, absent way, for which there appeared no valid reasons, unless he had become alive to the doubts of Harriet’s affection for him; an absence of mind, and even an irritability, which was disguised well enough from the father—before whom Sidney was more or less an actor—but which Mattie, ever on the watch, was quick as usual to detect.

She had become puzzled by Harriet’s abstraction, and had looked for its reflex at once in Sidney Hinchford’s face—finding it there, as she thought, after a while.

Mattie, left in the dark as to the truth, and every day becoming more of a young woman, who knew her place, and felt the distance between her master’s daughter, her master’s lodgers, and herself, could but draw her own conclusions, and frame a story from them.

Harriet and Sidney had quarrelled, and were keeping their quarrel a secret from the good folk at Camberwell; something had happened to cast a gloom on the way that Mattie thought would be ever bright and rosy, and each day they who should have been lovers seemed drifting further apart. She would have liked to play the part of mediator between them—to see them friends again—but her position held her back, and she had not the courage of a year ago. Those two young lovers had been the bright figures in her past—her life had somehow become blended with them, and she felt that her interest was of a cumulative character, and not likely to die out with her ripper womanhood. She could not disassociate her mind away from them; at every turn in her career they were before her; they haunted her thoughts, and harassed her with their seeming inconsistencies of conduct. She did not understand them, for the clew to the inner life was absent from her; she could not see why Harriet was not a girl to love this young man with all her heart, as she was loved; she felt that there was an assimilation between the strength of one and the weakness that needed support in the other; and that Sidney’s earnest love should have more deeply impressed a heart naturally susceptible to any thing that was honest and true.

And yet Harriet grew paler, and looked disturbed in mind, and Sidney Hinchford came home from business every day with a deeper shade of thought upon his face. He went less often to Camberwell also—she took notice of that—and staid up late at night in the drawing-room, after having deluded his father into the belief that he should be only a few moments after him. All was mystery in Suffolk Street, denser than the fogs which crept thither so often in the winter time.

Mr. Wesden, before retiring from business, had left strict orders with Mattie to be the last to go round the house, and see, in particular, to the gas-burners, and the bolts which Ann Pack-et was continually leaving unfastened, and had once received warning for in Mr. Wesden’s time. Mattie had injunctions to see to the drawing-room burners as well; to wait to an hour however late for the Hinchford exit.

This waiting up became a serious matter when Sidney Hinchford remained in the drawing-room till the small hours of the morning, and brooded over his papers, with which one table or another was invariably strewn. Mattie, a young woman of business, who did a fair day's work, and rose early, ventured to remonstrate at last; it was intrenching beyond her province, but she made the plunge in a manner very nervous and new to her—in a manner that even confused herself a little.

He brought the remonstrance upon himself by coming down into the shop to hunt for some writing-paper, which he intended to pay for in the morning, and was a little surprised to find Mattie sewing briskly in the back parlor.

"Up still, Mattie?—late hours for you," he said.

"Ah! and for you, too, Sir."

"Men can do with little rest, and I never leave one day's work for the next," said he, in that quick manner which had become habitual to him, and which appeared, to strangers, tinged with more abruptness than was really intended. "I was thinking of robbing your stationery drawer, Mattie, and lo the thief is detected in the act."

"Oh! I hope you do not intend any more work to-night, Sir."

"Why not?" he asked, his eyes expressing a mild sort of surprise through his spectacles.

"I'm waiting to see the gas out in that table-lamp."

"Can't I see to it myself?"

"I thought so until I found the tap in the India-rubber pipe turned full on last night."

"Did you sit up last night, too?"

"Mr. Wesden has always wished that I should make sure every thing was safe."

"But I'm busy just now; you mustn't be a slave as well as myself."

"I hope you're not a slave, Mr. Sidney," said Mattie, assuming that half-familiar style of conversation which was natural to her with her two old friends, and which always escaped in spite of her, "or that you will not keep one much longer, for it's not improving your looks, I can tell you."

"You can tell me," said Sidney; "well, what's the matter with my looks, Mattie?"

Mattie looked steadily at him.

"You're paler than you used to be," she said, after a while; "you're not like yourself; you've something on your mind."

Sidney frowned, rubbed his hair up the wrong way, after his father's fashion, cleared off suddenly and then laughed.

"Who hasn't?" was his reply.

"There's nothing which can't easily be got over, or my name isn't Mattie," said our heroine, with great firmness.

She was full of her one reason for all this thought on his side, and the confusion and perplexity on Harriet's, and she delivered her hint emphatically.

"I don't despair of getting over most things," he said, with a forced lightness that did not deceive his observer; "there's only one thing in the way that bothers me."

He said it more to himself than Mattie, who cried, instinctively—

"What's that, Sir?"

"Why, that's my secret," he responded, shut-

ting up on the instant; "and I shall keep it till the last."

He had turned very stern and rigid; Mattie felt that she had crossed the line of demarcation, and withdrew into herself and her needle-work with a sigh.

Sidney Hinchford shook himself away from that dark thought instantaneously.

"You're as curious as ever, Mattie—you'll be a true woman. I would not be your husband for the world."

Mattie felt herself crimson on the instant, and a strange wild commotion in her heart ensued, more unaccountable than the mystery which had deepened around her. They were light, idle words of his, but they made her cheeks flush and her bosom heave; he spoke in jest, almost in sarcasm, but the words rang in her ears as though he had thundered them forth with all the power of his lungs.

When all this Suffolk Street life was over; when she and he, when she and they whom she loved had gone their separate ways, when she was an old woman, she remembered Sidney Hinchford's words.

Still she flashed back the jesting reply—or whatever it was—with a quickness that was startling.

"You'll wait till you're asked," she said.

At this moment some one knocked at the outer door.

"Hollo! a late customer like me," said Sidney, opening the door as he was nearer to it, and then staring with surprise at the person who had arrived—no less a person than Mr. Wesden himself.

"Hollo!" he said, again; "nothing wrong, Sir, I hope?"

"Not at home," was the dry response. "Is any thing wrong here?"

"Oh no!"

He entered, took the door-handle from Sidney, and closed the door himself, turned the key in the lock, and drew the bolts to. Sidney Hinchford thought Mr. Wesden looked very nervous that evening—very different from his usual stolid way.

"You're quite sure—quite sure that it's all right, Sir?" asked Sidney, his thoughts flashing to Harriet again.

"I said so; I never tell an untruth, Sidney. Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir. Oh!" turning back, "the letter-paper, Mattie—I had forgotten."

Mr. Wesden watched the transfer of the writing-paper from the drawer to Sidney Hinchford's hands, glanced furtively from Sidney to Mattie, gradually unwinding a woollen comforter from his neck meanwhile.

When Sidney had withdrawn, very much perplexed, but too dignified to ask any more questions, Mr. Wesden turned to Mattie.

"What's he doing down here at this time of night, Mattie?"

"He came for writing-paper—he's very busy."

"What are you sitting up for?"

"To see to the gas-burners in the drawing-room."

"Turn the gas off at the meter, and leave him in the dark next time," said Mr. Wesden. "You can go to bed now. I'll sit up for a little while; I'm going to sleep here to-night."

"Indeed, Sir! Oh, Sir! I hope that nothing serious has happened?"

"Nothing at all. It's not so very wonderful that I should come to my own house, I suppose, Mattie?"

"N-no," she answered, hesitating; "but it's past one o'clock."

"I couldn't sleep—and Harriet was at home with the good lady," he said, as if by way of excuse; adding very sulkily, a moment afterward: "I never could sleep in that Camberwell place—I wish I'd never left the shop!"

Mr. Wesden hazarded no further reason for his eccentric arrival, and Mattie went up stairs to lay it with the rest of her stock of mysteries daily accumulating round her. Mr. Wesden remained down stairs, fidgeting with shop drawers, counting the money left in the till, and wandering up and down in a reckless, hypochondriacal fashion, very remarkable in a man of his phlegmatic temperament, and which it was as well for Mattie not to have seen.

Finally he groped his way down stairs into the kitchen, and the coal-cellar where the gas-meter was placed, and with a wrench cut off the supply of gas for that night, casting Sidney Hinchford so suddenly into darkness that he leaped up with an exclamation far from appropriate to his character.

"What the devil next?"

The next thing for Sidney was to knock over the chair he had been sitting upon, which came down on the drawing-room floor with a bumping noise that shook the house, and woke up his father, who shouted forth his name.

"Coming, coming!" said Sidney, walking into the double-bedded room, and giving up further study or brooding for that night.

"What's the matter, Sid, my boy?" asked the father, from the corner; "haven't you been in bed yet?"

"Must have fallen asleep in the next room, I think."

"And a terrible row you've made in waking, Sid. Good-night, my boy—God bless you!"

The old gentleman turned on his side, and was soon indulging in the snores of the just again. There was a night-light burning there, and Sidney took it from its saucer of water and held it above his head, looking down at that old world-worn yet handsome face of the father.

"God bless you!" he said, re-echoing his father's benediction; "how will you bear it when the time comes, I wonder?"

CHAPTER VI.

A BURST OF CONFIDENCE.

Yes, Mr. Wesden, late of Suffolk Street, had become nervous and eccentric in his old age—many people do, besides stationers. He had retired from business too late to enjoy the relaxation from business cares; he had better have died in harness than have given up the shop, for isolation therefrom began to work its evil.

He had not had much to worry him in his middle age; his youth had been a struggle, but he had been young and strong to bear with it, blest by a homely and affectionate wife, who struggled with him and consoled him; then had

followed, for more years than we care to reckon just now, the everyday life of a London slop-keeper—a life of business-making and money-making, plodding on in one groove, with little change to distract his attention or trouble his brain. All quiet and monotonous, but possessing for John Wesden peace of mind, which, if not exactly happiness, was akin to it. And now in his old age, when every habit had been burned into him as it were, business was over, and idleness became a sore trial to him. And then after idleness came his daughter to worry him, not to mention Mattie, who worried him most of all, for reasons which we shall more closely particularize a chapter or two hence.

So, with these troubles bearing all at once upon a mind that had been at its ease in its stronger days, Mr. Wesden turned eccentric. Want of method rendered him fidgety—the mysteries in his path, as well as Mattie's, perplexed him; he was verging upon hypochondriacism without being aware of it himself; and that suspicious nature which had been born with him began to develop itself more, and give promise of bearing forth bitter fruit. Possibly before his concern for his daughter's health was his concern for the shop in Great Suffolk Street, which he considered that he had neglected in leaving to the charge of a girl not eighteen years of age, and which, since the robbery, was an oppression that weighed heavily upon him. He was full of fancies concerning that shop; his mind—which unfortunately was fed by fancies at that time—began to give way somewhat when he took it in his head to think something had happened at twelve o'clock at night, and start at once for Great Suffolk Street, as we have noticed in our preceding chapter.

The ice once broken, the eccentricities of Mr. Wesden did not diminish; he had his old bedroom seen to in the house again, and surprised Mattie more than once after this by sudden appearances at untimely hours. He had a right to look after his business—did *people* think that he had lost his interest in the shop because he lived away from it?—did *people* think that he was not sharp enough for business still? With these changes he became more nervous, more irritable, and less considerate; yet brightening up sometimes for weeks together, and becoming his old stolid self again, to the relief of his wife and daughter. That daughter detected the change in her father also, woke up at last to the fact that her own thoughtfulness had tended to unsettle him, and became more like her old self also—or rather, more of an actress, with the power to personate that self from which she had seceded.

Every thing was going wrong with our characters, when Harriet Wesden broke through the ice one night with that impulsiveness which she had not lived down or grown out of. It was strange that she always broke down in Mattie's presence; that only in the company of the stray did she feel the wish to avow all, and seek counsel in return. To Harriet Wesden the impulse was incomprehensible, but it was beyond her strength, at times, and carried her away. She loved Mattie; she saw in her the faithful friend rather than the servant; she knew that the child's passionate love for her had grown with Mattie's growth, and absorbed her being. But

love was but half the reason with Harriet, and she would not own—which was the secret—that the weak and timid nature sought relief from a mind that had grown strong and practical in a rough school.

A need of sympathy, a perplexity becoming greater every day, allied to a love for the confidante, brought about the truth, which escaped in the old fashion.

She had been paying her visit—an afternoon one in this instance—to Mattie at the shop; it was a dull season, and no business stirring; the December gloom preyed upon the spirits of most people abroad that day; it affected Harriet more than usual, or the pressure of the old thoughts reduced her to subjection at last. The two girls were sitting by the fireside, Mattie with her face turned to the shop door, when Harriet Wesden laid both her hands suddenly on our heroine's.

"Mattie," she cried, "look me in the face a moment!"

"Come round to the little light there is left, then."

"There!"

Harriet Wesden set her pretty face, pale and anxious then, more into the light required. Mattie regarded it attentively.

"Isn't it a false face?" asked Harriet, in an excited manner—"the face of one who brings sorrow and wrong to all who know her?"

"I hope not."

"It is!" she asserted. "Oh, Mattie! I am in distress, and terrible doubt; I have been foolish, and acted inconsiderably; I am in a maze, that becomes more tangled with every step I take. Tell me what to do!"

"You ought to know best, dear; you should not have any troubles which you are afraid to confess to your father and mother, and—and Mr. Hinchford."

"Yes, yes, but not to them first of all," she cried. "Oh, Mattie! I am not a wicked girl, God knows. I have never had a thought of wickedness. I would like every body in the world to be as happy as I was once myself."

"Once!" repeated Mattie. "Oh! I won't have that."

"I don't think," she added, very thoughtfully regarding the fire, "that I should be ever happy again. Now, Mattie dear, I'm going to swear you to secrecy, and then ask what you would do in my place."

"You're very kind to trust in me—but is there no one else?—Miss Eveleigh, for instance."

"She's a worse silly than I am!"

"Your mother."

"I should frighten her to death; she and father are both weak, and altering very much. Oh, Mattie! if they should die and leave me alone in the world!"

"Need you get nervous about that just now?"

"I'm nervous about every thing—I'm unsettled—Mattie, I have acted very treacherously to him."

"To Mr. Sidney!—not to Mr. Sidney?"

"Yes," was the answer.

Mattie became excited. How had it occurred? who had done it? who had stolen her thoughts away from him?

"I have been trying very hard to love him—sometimes I think I do love him better than the—*other*—just for a while, when he is very

happy sitting near me, and very full of the future, that can never, never come."

"Go on, please," said the curious Mattie.

"Mattie, you remember Mr. Darcy?" she asked, spasmodically.

"Mr. Darcy—no," said the puzzled Mattie.

"The gentleman who—who fell in love with me when I was a child," she explained, very rapidly, and with still greater excitement, "whom I thought I had forgotten, and who had forgotten me, until I met him again."

"Oh! this is wrong!" exclaimed Mattie.

"I know it—I have owned it!" cried Harriet; "let me tell the story out. I met him, parted coldly from him, met him again, all by accident on my part; met him for a third time at the Eveleighs, with whom he had got on visiting terms; met him day after day, evening after evening there, until the spell was on me which overpowered me, and robbed me of my peace—until I loved him, Mattie!"

"And he knows—"

"He knows nothing, save that I am engaged to be another's—and that I dare scarcely think of him."

"He knows too much, I know," said Mattie, reflectively; "and he has found a way to turn you against Mr. Sidney. What a wonder he must be!"

"Poor Sidney!"

"And to think it's all over between you and him," added Mattie; "him who thinks so much of you, and is growing old to my eyes, with the fear upon him which I understand now, and which is now so natural."

"What fear?"

"Of losing you."

"I am so sorry—so very sorry for him. And I am ashamed to think that I have led him on to build his hopes upon me, and now must dash them down."

"Yes—to-night," said Mattie, thoughtfully.

"To-night!" exclaimed Harriet, in alarm.

"I don't know much about these things; I never understood what love for a young man was, having had too much to do," she added, with a little laugh, that echoed strangely in that shadowy room; "but it don't seem quite the thing to keep the two on, or both of them in suspense about you."

"Do you think I would?" asked Harriet, proudly.

"It seems to me that if I were in your place I should take a pattern from Mr. Sidney, and speak out at once—go straight at it, as he calls it—and tell him every thing."

"But—"

Mattie became excited in her turn.

"It isn't right—it isn't fair to let a man keep thinking of you when you've turned against him," she cried: "it's cowardly and base to hide the truth from him, or be afraid of telling it. It won't kill him, Harriet, for he's a proud spirit that will bear up through it all, bitterly as he will feel it for a while."

"I'm not afraid—it is not that," said Harriet; "I only wish to know what you would think the best method of telling him all, and yet sparing him pain. I have been fancying that if you hinted to him at first the truth—"

"I hint!" exclaimed Mattie; "not for the world. I'm only a servant here, and you might

as well ask poor Ann Packet to hint the truth as me. I'm sorry—you will never know how sorry I am—that you two are going to break it off forever; but I should be more sorry still if you let to-night go by, and not try hard to face him."

"Mattie, I will face him," said Harriet, with her lips compressed; "I will tell him all. After all, it was not an engagement, and I was as free as he to make my choice elsewhere if I preferred. I am not in the wrong to tell him that my girl-ish fancy was a mistake."

"No—only in the wrong to keep the truth back."

"You will not think that I have intentionally attempted to deceive poor Sidney, will you?"

"God forbid, my dear."

"Vain, frivolous, and weak—any thing but cruel. Yes, I will tell him all when he comes back to-night. There is no use in delay."

"Only danger," added Mattie, remembering her copy-book admonition—a copy which Sidney Hinchford had set her himself in the old days when she was deep in text-hand.

"And then when it is all told, and he knows that I am free, happiness will come again, I suppose. Heigh-ho! I was very happy once."

"Happiness will come again," said Mattie, more cheerfully, "to be sure."

"Mattie, I have been trying very hard to think of Mr. Sidney first of all; it is that trying which has made me ill. I know he loves me very much, and will never think of any body else; and it is—it is hard upon him now."

"You must be very fond of this other one," said Mattie. "Is he handsome?"

"Very."

"And very fond of you, of course?"

"Yes; but it is a struggle to keep his love back. I am cold to him; and I—I will not listen to him, and so drive him to despair. Oh! I am a miserable wretch! I make every body unhappy whom I meet."

The weak girl burst into tears, and rocked herself to and fro on the chair before the fire. Mattie passed her arms round her neck and drew the pretty agitated face to her bosom, soothing it there as though she had been a mother troubled with love-sick daughters of her own.

"It will soon be over now," Mattie said, when Harriet was more composed. "Try and be calm; think of what you shall say to poor Sidney, while I attend to the shop a bit."

Mattie went into the shop, leaving Harriet Wesden with her chin clutched in both hands, looking dreamily at the fire. She was more composed now the whole truth had escaped her; she felt that she should be happy in time, after Sidney Hinchford had been told all, and that terrible ordeal of telling it had been gone through. One more scene, which had made her shudder to forestall by sober thought, and then the new life, brighter and rosier from that day!

Poor Sidney! what should she say to him to soften the look which would rise to his dark eyes and transfix her? What was best to say and do, to keep him from thinking ill of her, and despising her for vacillation?

Mattie came in looking white and scared; but Harriet, possessed by a new thought which

had suddenly dashed in upon her, failed to observe the change.

"Mattie, dear," she cried, "if he should think I give him up because he's poorer than Mr. Darcy—that it is for the sake of money that I turn away from him!"

"Money's a troublesome thing," said Mattie, snatching up her bonnet from the side-board, and putting it on her head with trembling hands: "if you take your eyes from it for an instant, it's gone."

"But, Mr. Darcy—"

"Oh! bother Mr. Darcy," was the half-peevish exclamation. "I have been listening to you, and they've robbed the shop again. Every thing's against me just now! Mind the place till I come back, please."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLAN FRUSTRATED.

YES, the house in Great Suffolk Street had been again visited by "the dangerous classes." It was a house well watched, or a house that was doomed to be unfortunate in its latter days. A house left in charge of a girl of seventeen, therefore likely to have its weak points, and considered worth watching in the dark hours. This was Mattie's idea upon awakening to the conviction of a second successful attempt upon Mr. Wesden's property; but Mattie was wrong.

The robbery was the result of accident and neglect, as most robberies are in this world. A youth had entered the shop to make a small purchase, and hammered honestly on the counter with the edge of his penny piece—a youth of no principle, certainly, brought up ragged, dirty, ignorant, and saucy—a Borough boy. Fate and the devil contrived that Mattie should be absorbed in the love-story of Harriet Wesden at the time, and the boy finding no attention paid to his summons, looked over the shop blind, saw the rapt position of the parlor occupants, dropped upon his hands and knees like a lad brought up to the "profession," and slid insidiously toward the till, which he found locked and keyless. Fortune being against his possession of any current coin of the realm, the young vagabond turned his attention to stock, and in less time than it takes to sum up his defalcations, had appropriated and made off with a very large parcel underneath the counter—a parcel that Wiggins, wholesale stationers of Cannon Street, had just forwarded by London Parcels' Delivery Company to order of John Wesden, Esq., and which parcel had been found almost too large to decamp with.

Mattie thought no more of Harriet Wesden's troubles; here was a second instance of her carelessness—of her incapacity for business. What would Mr. Wesden think now; he who had been so cold and strange to her after the last robbery? And what did she deserve?—she who had had a trust committed to her and abused it.

Mattie did not give way to any ebullition of tears; she was a girl with considerable self-command, and only betrayed her agitation by her whiter face. She did all that lay in her power to remedy the great error, leaving Harriet Wesden in charge of the shop while she ran down

Great Suffolk Street and toward the Borough, hoping to overtake the robber. Straight to Kent Street went Mattie; thieves would be sure to make for Kent Street. All the years of her honest life faded away like a dream, and she ran at once to the house of a receiver of stolen goods, a house that she had known herself in the old guilty past.

Her hand was on the latch of the door when a policeman touched her on the arm,

"Do you want any thing here?"

"I've been robbed of a parcel—I thought they must have brought it here."

"Why here?"

"This is Simes's—this used to be Simes's—surely."

"Yes, and it's Simes's still; but nobody's been here with a parcel. You haven't been and left nobody in Mr. Wesden's shop?" was his ineloquent query.

Mattie did not remark that the policeman knew her then; she was too excited by her loss.

"Mr. Wesden's daughter's there."

"Then you had better come round to the police-station and state your loss, Miss."

Mattie thought so too; she went to the police-station, mentioned the facts of the robbery, the nature of the parcel stolen, etc., and then returned very grave and disconsolate to Great Suffolk Street, to find three customers waiting to be served, Harriet turning over drawer after drawer in search of the goods required, and one woman waiting for change, which Harriet, having mislaid her own purse and found the till locked, was unable to give her.

Mattie turned to business again, attended to the customers, and then re-entered the parlor.

"It can not be helped, and I must make the best of it," said Mattie; "I don't mind the loss it is to me, who'll pay for it out of my own earnings, as I do the vexation it will be to your father."

"Leave it to me, Mattie," said Harriet. "When I go home this evening I will tell him exactly how it occurred, and how it was not your fault but mine. And, Mattie, I intend to pay for it myself, and not have your hard earnings intrenched upon."

"You're not in trust here," said Mattie, somewhat shortly; "if I don't pay for it I shall be unhappy all my life."

"Then it's over and done with, and I wouldn't fret about it," said Harriet, suddenly finding herself in the novel position of comforter.

"I never fret, and I said that I would make the best of it," replied Mattie, placing her chair at the parlor door, half within the room and half in the shop; "and if I'm ever tricked again while I remain here it's very odd to me."

Harriet Wesden, not much impressed by so matter-a-fact event as a robbery, was anxious to return to the subject which more closely affected herself; the parcel, after all, was of no great value; the police were doubtless looking for the thief; let the matter be passed over for the present, and the great distress of her unsettled mind be once more gravely dwelt upon. This was scarcely selfishness—for Harriet Wesden was not a selfish girl—it was rather an intense craving for support in the hard task of shattering another's hopes.

They had tea together in that little back par-

lor, and Harriet found it difficult work to keep Mattie's thoughts directed to the subject upon which advice had been given before the theft.

"You will not think of me," she said at last, reproachfully; "and what does it matter about that rubbishy parcel?"

"What can I do for you more?" asked Mattie, wearily. Her head ached very much with all the excitement of that day, and she was inwardly praying for the time to pass, and the boy to put the shutters up. The robbery was not of great importance, and she wondered why it troubled her so much, and rendered her anxiety for others, just for a while, of secondary interest. Did she see looming before her the shadow of her coming trial? Was there foreknowledge of all in store for her stealing in upon her that dark December's night? She was superstitious enough to think so afterward, when the end had come, and life had wholly changed with her.

After tea Mattie's impression became less vivid, for Harriet's nervousness was on the increase. The stern business of life gave way to the romance—stern enough also at that time—of Harriet Wesden. It was close on seven o'clock, and every minute might bring the well-known form and figure home.

"I sha'n't know what to say," said Harriet. "It seems out of place to ask him in here, and coolly begin at once to tell him not to think of me any more, just as he comes home from business, tired and weary, too, poor Sid! Shall I write to him? I'll begin the letter now, and leave it here for you to give him. Oh! I can't face him—I shall never be able to face him and tell him how fickle-minded I am!"

"Write to him if you wish then, Harriet; perhaps it is best, and will spare you both some pain."

"Yes, yes, I'll write," said Harriet, opening Mattie's desk instantly, and sending its neatly arranged contents flying right and left; "it is much the better way—why make a scene of it? I hate scenes! And I'm not fickle-minded, Mattie," suddenly reverting to her self-accusation of a moment since; "for I had a right to think for myself and choose for myself—we were not to be engaged till next month; and I did like him once—I do now somehow! If he will only think well of me afterward, and not despise me, poor fellow! and believe that I had a right to turn away from him if my heart said that I was not suitable for him at the last. If he—Mattie, where do you keep your pens?"

Mattie remarked that she had turned the box full among the letter-paper. Harriet sat herself down to write the letter after much preparation and agitation; Mattie looked at her, sitting there, in the full light of the gas above her head, and thought how pretty a *child* she looked—how unfit to cope with the world's harshness—how lucky for her that she was the only child of parents who had made money for her, and so smoothed one road in life at least. Yes, more a child than a woman even then; capacious, excitable, easily influenced, swayed by a passing gust of passion like a leaf, trembling at the present, at the future, always unresolved, and yet always, by her trust and confidence in others, even by her sympathy for others, to be loved.

Mattie went into the shop, leaving Harriet to compose her epistle; after a while, and when

she was brooding on the parcel again, and wondering if Mrs. Watts were at the bottom of the robbery, Harriet called her. She took her place again on the neutral ground, between parlor and shop, and found Harriet very much discomfited; her face flushed, her fair hair ruffled about her ears, her blue eyes full of tears.

"I don't know what to say; I can't think of any thing that's kind enough, and good enough for him. What would you say, Mattie?"

"And you that have had so much money spent on your education to ask me—still a poor, ignorant, half-taught girl, Miss Harriet!"

"I'm too flurried to collect my thoughts—I can't think of the right words," she said; "I can't tell him of Mr. Darcy before Mr. Darcy has spoken to me—and I—I don't like to write down that I—I don't love him—never did love him—it looks so spiteful, dear! Mattie, what would you say?"

"I should simply tell him the story which you told me."

"He might show the letter to father and mother, who are anxious—oh! much more anxious than you fancy—to marry me to Sidney."

"They know his value, Harriet."

"And then it will all come at once to trouble them, instead of breaking it by degrees. Well, it's my fate. I must not keep it from them."

"No. How much have you written?"

"Dear Sidney"—and—and the day of the month, of course. Oh! dear—here he is!"

Away went paper and pens into the desk again, and the desk cleared from the table, and turned topey-turvy on to a chair.

"Oh! the top of the ink-stand's out—look here!—Oh! what a mess there'll be!" cried Mattie.

Harriet reversed the desk.

"Perhaps it's not all spilt—I'm very sorry to have made such a mess of it, and—and it's only Sidney's father, after all. Don't tell him I'm here."

The old gentleman came into the shop, and nodded toward Mattie standing in the doorway.

"Has my boy come home?" he asked.

"Not yet, Sir."

The father's countenance assumed a doleful expression on the instant; life without his boy was scarcely worth having.

"He's very late, then, for I'm late," looking at his watch; "I hope he hasn't been run over."

Mattie laughed at the expression of the father's fear.

"That's not likely, Sir."

"People do get run over at times, especially in the City, and more especially near-sighted people. There's nothing to laugh at."

And rather offended at the manner in which his gloomy suggestion had been received, Mr. Hinchford, senior, passed through the side-door into the passage. Mattie found Harriet at the desk again, picking out several sheets of paper saturated with ink, and arranging them of a row on the fender.

"More ink, dear, more ink!" she cried, impetuously; "I've thought of what to say. Don't keep me long without the ink."

Mattie replenished her ink-stand, and Harriet dashed into the subject with vigor, slackened after the first few lines, then came to a dead stop, and stared intently at the paper. Mattie

went into the shop for fear of disturbing Harriet's train of ideas, remained there an hour attending to customers and arranging stock, finally went back into the parlor.

The desk was closed once more; a heap of torn papers was on the floor. Harriet, with her bonnet and shawl on, and her eyes red with weeping, was pacing up and down the room.

"No letter?" asked Mattie.

"I can't write a letter and tell him what a wretch I am," she said; "and if I face him to-night I shall drop at his feet. Girl," she cried, passionately, "do you think it is so easy to act as I have done and then avow it?"

"I should not be ashamed to own it," was Mattie's calm answer: "I should consider it my duty to tell him."

"And I will tell him all. God knows I would not deceive him for the world, Mattie, or leave him in ignorance of the true state of my heart. But I can not tell him now. I'm afraid."

There was real fear in her looks, an intense excitement, that even alarmed Mattie. She saw, after all, that it was best to keep the secret back for that night.

"Then I would go home, Harriet, at once. To-morrow, when you are calmer, you may be able to write the letter."

"Yes, yes; to-morrow I will write it. I shall have all day before me, and can tear up as many sheets as I like. I will write it to-morrow, and post it from Camberwell. Mattie, as I'm a living woman, and as I pray to be free from this suspense and torture, I WILL write to him to-morrow!"

"One day is not very important," said Mattie, in reply, little dreaming of the difference that day would make. "Delays are dangerous—delays are dangerous!"—she had written twenty times in her copy-book, and taken not to heart; and there *was* danger on its way to those who had put off the truth, and to him for whom they feared it.

"Delays are dangerous!" Take it to heart, O reader, and remember it in the hour when you shrink from the truth, as from a hot iron that may sear you. Wise old admonitions of our copy-book times—we might do worse very often than laugh at ye!

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN JOURNEY.

HARRIET WESDEN hurried away after her promise; Mattie, at the last moment, recalling to her notice the fact of the robbery, and reminding her of the way in which she ought to break the news to her father. Then the excited girl darted away to Camberwell, and it was like the stillness of the grave in the back parlor after her departure. Mattie went in for an instant to set the place to rights, and then returned to her watch in the shop, and to her many thoughts, born of that day's incidents. She was quite prepared for a visit from Mr. Wesden at a late hour, but Mr. Wesden's movements under excitement were not to be calculated upon; and we may say here that the knowledge of his loss did not bring him post-haste to Great Suffolk Street. Mattie was thinking of her loss, when the passage door

opened, and the white head of Mr. Hinchford peered round and looked up at the clock, over the top shelf where the back stock was kept. The movement reminded Mattie of the time, and she glanced at the clock herself—*half past nine*.

"I thought the clock had stopped up stairs," he said, by way of explanation for his appearance.

"I had no idea it was so late," said Mattie.

"I had no idea it was so early," responded Mr. Hinchford; adding, after a pause, "though I can't think where the boy has got to; he said he would be home early, as he had some accounts to look through."

"It's not very late, Sir, and if he has gone to Camberwell, not knowing Miss Harriet was here to-night—"

"He always comes home first—I never knew him go any where without coming home first to tell me. But," with another look at the clock, "It's not so very late, as you say, Mattie."

"He will be here in a minute."

"I hope so," said Mr. Hinchford, going to the shop door, and looking down the street, "for it's coming on to rain, and he has no umbrella. The boy will catch his death of cold."

After standing at the door for two or three minutes, the old gentleman turned to go up stairs again.

"It'll be a thorough wet night. I'll tell Ann to keep plenty of water in the boiler; nothing like your feet in hot water to stave off a cold."

He retired. Half an hour afterward he reappeared in the shop, excitable and fidgety.

"I can't make it out," he said, after another inspection of the clock; "there's something wrong."

"Perhaps he has gone to the play, Sir."

"Pooh! he hates plays," was the contemptuous comment to this; "he wouldn't waste his time in a play-house. No, Mattie there's something wrong."

"I don't think so," said Mattie, cheerfully.

"I would not worry about his absence just yet, Sir."

"I'll give him another hour, and then I'll go down to the office and ask after him."

"Or find him there, Sir."

"No, they're not busy, I think. He can't be there. Mattie," he said, suddenly, "have you noticed a difference in him lately?"

"I—I fancy he seems, perhaps, a little graver; but then he's growing older and more manly every day."

"Ah! he grows a fine fellow. There isn't such another boy in the world. Perhaps it's all a fancy of mine, after all."

Mattie knew that it was no fancy; that even Sidney's care and histrionic efforts could not disguise his trouble entirely from the father. But she played the part of consoler to Mr. Hinchford as well as she was able, and the old gentleman, less disturbed in mind, returned to his room for the second time.

But time stole on, and Mattie herself found a new anxiety added to those which had heretofore disturbed her. The wet night set in as Mr. Hinchford had prophesied; the boy came and put up the shutters; the clock ticked on toward eleven; all but the public houses were closed in Great Suffolk Street, and there were but few loiterers about.

Ann Packet brought in the supper, and was informed of the day's two features of interest—the robbery and the absence of Mr. Sidney. Ann Packet, of slow ideas herself, and slower still in having other ideas instilled into her, thought that the missing parcel was connected with the missing lodger, and so conglomerated matters irremediably.

"You may depend upon it, Mattie, he'll bring the parcel back; it's one of his games; he was a rare boy for tricks when I knew him fust."

"Ann, you've been asleep," said Mattie, sharply.

"I couldn't help it," answered Ann, submissively; "it was very lonely down there, with no company but the *beadles*—and times ain't as they used to was, when you could read to me, and was more often down there."

"Ah! times are altering," sighed Mattie.

"And Mr. Wesden don't like me here till after the shop's shut—because he can't trust me, or I talk too much, I s'pose," she said; "but now, dear, sit down and tell me all about every thing to keep my sperits up."

Ann Packet and Mattie always supped together after the shop was closed. Ann Packet lived for supper-time now, looked forward all the day to a "nice bit of talk" with the girl who had won upon those affections which three-fourths of her life had rusted from disuse.

"It's uncommon funny that I never had any body to care about afore I knowed you, Mattie," she said regularly once or twice a week; "no father, mother, sisters, any body, till you turned up like the ace in spekkilation. And now, let me hear you talk, my dear. I don't fancy that your tongue runs on quite so fast as it did."

Ann Packet curled herself in her chair, hazarded one little complaint about her ankles, which were setting in badly again with the Christmas season, and then prepared to make herself comfortable, when once more Mr. Hinchford appeared, with his hat, stick, and great cloak this time.

"Mattie, I can't stand it any longer—I'm off to the office in the City."

Mattie did not like the look of his excited face.

"I'd wait a little while longer, Sir."

"No; something has happened to the boy."

"Shall I go with you, Sir?"

"God bless the girl!—what for?"

"For company's sake; it's late for you to be alone, Sir."

"Don't you think I can take care of myself? Am I so old, feeble, and driveling as that? Are they right at the office, after all?" he added, in a lower tone.

"I shouldn't like to be left here all alone," murmured Ann Packet; "particularly after there's been robberies, and—"

There was the rattle of cab-wheels in the street, coming nearer and nearer toward the house.

"Hark!" said Mattie and Mr. Hinchford in one breath.

The rattling ceased before the door, the cab stopped, Mr. Hinchford pointed to the door, and gasped, and gesticulated.

"Open, o—open the door! He has met with an accident!"

"No, no, he has only taken a cab to get here earlier, and escape the wet," said Mattie, opening the door with a beating heart nevertheless.

Sidney Hinchford, safe and sound, was already out of the cab and close to the door. Mattie met him with a bright smile of welcome, to which his sombre face did not respond. He came into the shop, stern and silent, and then looked toward his father.

"I thought you might have gone to bed, father," he said.

"Bed!" ejaculated Mr. Hinchford, in disgust; "what has—what has—"

"Come up stairs, I wish to speak to you."

Father and son went up stairs to their room, leaving Mattie at the open door. The cab still remained drawn up there; the cabman stood by the horse's head, stolid as a judge in his manifold capes.

"Are you waiting for any thing?" asked Mattie.

"For the gemman, to be sure."

"Going back again?"

"He says so—I s'pose it's all right," he added, dubiously; "you've no back door which he can slip out of?"

"Slip out of!" cried the disgusted Mattie, slamming the front door in his face for his impudent assertion.

Meanwhile Sidney Hinchford was facing his father in the drawing-room.

"Sit down and take the news coolly, Sir," he said; "there's nothing gained by putting yourself in a flurry."

"N—no, no, my boy, n—no."

"I have no time to spare, and I wish to leave you all right before I go."

"Go!"

"I am going for a day or two, very likely for a week, on a special mission for my employers—that is all that I can tell you without breaking the confidence placed in me. I must go at once."

"Bless my soul! what—what can I possibly do without you? Can't I go with you? Can't I—"

"You can do nothing but wait patiently for my return, believing that I am safe and taking care of myself. Why, what are a few days?"

"Well, not much after all," said the father, wiping his forehead with his silk handkerchief; "and there's no danger, of course?"

"Not any."

"And you are only going—"

"A journey of a few days. Try and calm yourself while I pack a few things in my portmanteau. There, that's well!"

Sidney passed into the other room, leaving his father still struggling with the effects of his astonishment. The portmanteau must have been filled without any regard to neatness, for Sidney in a few minutes returned with it in his hands.

"Why, you should be proud of this journey of mine," he said with a forced lightness that could only have deceived his father; "think what it is to be chosen out of the whole office to undertake this business."

"It's a good sign. Yes, I see that now."

"And I shall be back sooner than you expect, perhaps. Why, you and I must not part like two silly girls, to whom the journey of a few miles is the event of a life. Now, good-by, Sir—God keep you strong and well till I come back again!"

"And you, my lad, and you, too."

"Amen. God grant it."

There was a strange earnestness in the son's voice, but the father was still too much excited to take heed.

"And now good-by again," shaking his father's hands; "you'll stay here, Sir, you'll not come down any more to-night."

"Yes, I will."

"You must try and keep calm; I will beg you as a favor to remain here, father."

"Well, well, if you wish it—but I'm not a child."

Sidney released his father's hands, caught up his portmanteau, and marched down stairs. Mattie, pale with suppressed excitement, met him in the shop. He put down his burden, caught her by the wrist, and drew her into the parlor. Seeing Ann Packet there, he made her go down stairs somewhat abruptly, released his grip of Mattie, and waited for Ann's withdrawal, beating his foot impatiently upon the carpet.

Mattie looked nervously toward him, and thought that she had never seen him look more stern and hard. His face was deathly white, and his eyes burned like coals behind the glasses that he wore.

"Mattie," he said, "you and I, my father and you, are old friends."

"Yes, Sir."

"I will ask a favor of you before I go. Take care of him! Ask him to come down here to smoke his pipe with you, and keep him as light-hearted as you can till I return."

"Who?—I, Sir?"

"You have the way with you; you are quick to observe, and it will not take much pains to keep him pleased, I think. When he begins to wonder why I haven't returned, break to him by degrees that I have deceived him, fearing the shock too sudden for his strength."

"Oh, Sir! how can you leave all this to me?"

"I have faith in no one else, Mattie, to do me this service. You are always cool, and will know the best way to proceed. Cheer up the old gentleman all you can, too. You were a quaint girl once; don't let him miss me if you can help it."

"And you'll be gone—"

"Six weeks or two months."

"It's not a very happy journey, Sir."

"How do you know that?" was the quick rejoinder.

"You're not looking happy—there's trouble in your face, Mr. Sidney."

"Well, there is room for it, and I am going, as I fear, to face trouble, and bring back with me disappointment. We can't have it all our own way in this world, Mattie."

"No, Sir, that's not likely."

"And if there be more troubles than one ahead, why we must fight against them till we beat them back or they crush us under foot. Good-by!"

He shook hands with her long and heartily, adding, "You will remember your trust; you will break the news to him like a daughter?"

"I'll do my best, Sir."

"He knows that I can not send him any letters."

"And—and letters for you?"

She thought of the letter which Harriet Wenden, in her sleepless bed, might be pondering upon then. Of the new trouble which he seem-

ed to guess not; for immediately afterward he said:

"Keep the letters till I come back, and give my love to Harriet; tell her I shall think of her every hour of the day and night. I wrote to her the last thing this evening. Now, good-by, old girl, and wish me luck."

"The best of luck, Mr. Sidney, with all my heart!"

"Luck in the distance—luck when I come back again, and see it shining in my Harriet's eyes. Ah! *it won't do!*" he added, with a stamp of his foot.

"I'll pray for it, Sir," cried Mattie; "we can't tell what may happen for the best, or what is for the best, however it may trouble us at first."

"Spoken like the parson at the corner-shop," he said, a little irreverently. "Bravo, Mattie—honest believer!"

He passed from the shop into his cab, glancing at the up-stairs windows, and waving his hand for a moment toward his father, waiting anxiously there to see the last of him.

The cab rattled away the moment afterward, and Sidney Hinchford was borne on his unknown journey.

* * * * *

On the evening of the next day a letter, in Harriet Wesden's handwriting, was received. The postman and Mr. Hinchford, senior, came into the shop together.

"Sidney Hinchford, Esq.," said the postman.

"Thank you; I'll post it to him when he sends me his address," said Mr. Hinchford. "By Jove!" looking at the superscription, "the ladies miss him already."

Harriet Wesden had kept her promise, and found courage to write her story out.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOUDS THICKEN.

MATTIE had fully anticipated a visit from Mr. Wesden on the day following Sidney Hinchford's departure, but the master appeared not at the little shop in Great Suffolk Street. It was not till the following day that he arrived, at six in the morning, as the boy was taking down the shutters. Mattie's heart began beating painfully fast; she had become very nervous concerning Mr. Wesden, and his thoughts of her. Appearances had been against her of late, and he was a man who did not think so charitably as he acted sometimes.

He gave a gruff good-morning, and came behind the counter.

"You can do what you like to-day," he said. "I'll mind the shop."

"Very well, Sir. I—I suppose," she added, hastily, "Miss Harriet has told you what happened the day before yesterday?"

"I know all about it. I don't want to talk about it."

"But I do, Sir!"

Mr. Wesden stared over Mattie's head after his old fashion. His will had been law so long that disputing it rather took him aback.

"I know that these losses put you out, Mr. Wesden," said Mattie, firmly; "that they are

due to my own carelessness, to having been taken off my guard after all my watch here, all my interest in every thing connected with the business. I dream of the shop—I would not neglect it for the world—and it is hard to be so unfortunate as I have been. Mr. Wesden, you wouldn't let me repay back the money which was taken away from the house; but I must pay the value of that parcel stolen from before my very eyes."

"It was large enough to see," he added, "and I expect you to pay for it, Mattie."

"What was it worth?"

"You shall have the bill to settle, if you've saved as much—it will come in next week. And now just understand, once for all, that I don't want to talk about it—that I object very much to talk about it."

"Very well."

The subject was dropped; Mattie felt herself in disgrace, and, intensely sorrowful at heart, she went down stairs to tell Ann Packet all that her carelessness had brought upon her.

"He's an old savage, my dear—don't mind him."

"No, Ann—he's a dear old friend, and his anger is just enough. It was all my fault!"

"Well, he's not such a bad master as he might be, pr'aps; but he isn't what he used to be before my ankles took to swelling, nothing like it."

"It will soon blow over, I hope," said Mattie.

"Bless your heart!—puffed away in a breath it'll be."

Mattie, ever ready to console others, received consolation in her turn, and hoped for the best.

Late in the evening Mr. Wesden departed, and early next day, much to Mattie's surprise, Harriet Wesden, with a box or two, arrived in a cab to the house.

Mattie watched the entrance of the boxes, and looked very closely into the face of the young mistress. Harriet, with a smile that was well got up for the occasion, advanced to her.

"Think, Mattie, of my coming here to spend a week with you—of being your companion. Why it'll be the old times back again."

"I should be more glad to see you if I thought there were no other reason, Miss Harriet," said Mattie; "but there is!"

"Why, what can there—"

Mattie caught her by the sleeve.

"Your father suspects that I am not honest—the past life has come a little closer, and made him repent of all the past kindness—is not that it?"

"No, no, Mattie, dear—you must not think that!"

"He has grown suspicious of me—I can see it in his looks, in his altered manner; and, oh! I can do nothing to stop it—to show him that I am as honest as the day."

"Patience, Mattie, dear," said Harriet, "we will soon prove that to him, if he require proof. If I have come at his wish, it was at my own, too, and you are exaggerating the reasons that have brought me hither."

"I wonder why I stop here now," said Mattie, thoughtfully; "I, who am a young woman, and can get my own living. If he is tired of me, I have no right to stop."

"You will stop for the sake of those who love

you, and who have trust in you, Mattie; you will not think of going away."

"Well, not yet a while. I think," dashing a rebellious tear from her dark eyes, "that I can bear more than this before I leave you all. And if things do look a little dark just now, I shall live them down, with God's help!"

"There's nothing dark—it's three-fourths fancy. Think of my sorrows, Mattie, and thank Heaven that you have never been in love!"

"Dreadful sorrows yours are, Miss Harriet, I must say!"

"People never think much of other people's sorrows," remarked Harriet, sentimentously.

Thus it came about that Harriet Wesden and Mattie were thrown into closer companionship for a while, and that Mattie began to think that the constant presence of the girl she loved most in the world made ample amends for the suspicions which had placed her there, for the absence of Sidney Hinchford, and the mystery by which it had been characterized.

"It's astonishing how I miss Mr. Sidney," Mattie said, confidently, to Harriet, "though we did not say much more than 'good-morning' and 'good-evening' from one week's end to another; but he has been so long here, and become so long a part of home, that it does seem strange to have the place without him."

"And the letter—he never got the letter, after all," sighed Harriet.

"There it is, on the drawing-room mantle-piece," said Mattie; "bad news awaiting his return. I see it every morning there, and think of his coming disappointment."

"He'll soon get over it—men, soon get over it," replied Harriet; "they have so much to do in the world, and so many things therein to distract them. It's not like us poor girls, who think of nothing else but whom it is best to love, and who will love us best."

"Speak for your own romantic self, Miss Harriet," said Mattie, laughing.

"You never think of these things!—you, close on eighteen years of age!"

"Never," said Mattie, fearlessly; "I seem a little out of the way of it—it's not in my line. But I understand it well enough."

"Or you would have never taken my part against poor old Sid," said Harriet.

"And that reminds me that I am neglecting poor old Sid's father, and I promised not."

Sid's father required no small amount of attention, Mattie very quickly discovered; the absence of his son preyed upon the old gentleman, and left him entirely alone. The place was a desert without "the boy;" with all his love for him, he could not have imagined that his absence would have led to such a blank. He thought that he could have put up with it, and jogged along in his old methodical way until Sid's return; but the horrors seized him in the attempt, and it was more of a struggle to keep time from killing him than to kill the hoary enemy by distraction of pursuits.

He became absent over the account-books at the builder's office, and the clerks laughed at him and his mistakes; while the employers, who had found him slow in his movements for some time, thought he was getting past work and becoming unendurable. These old-fashioned clerks will get in the way when the hand grows feeble

and the memory betrays them. Commerce has no fine feelings, and must sweep them aside for better men without compunction.

Mattie, remembering her promise to Sidney, and favored in the performance of it by Harriet's extra service, played her cards well, and helped to while away many hours that would have weighed heavily with Mr. Hinchford. An excuse to enter the room led to a remark concerning Sidney, which rendered the old gentleman voluble; and the presence of Harriet Wesden down stairs, his son's future wife, formed a good excuse to lure him into the parlor, and persuade him to smoke his pipe there. Then Mattie began to think that she should like to know backgammon, and Mr. Hinchford condescended to instruct her, as he had instructed her, when she was younger, in orthography and syntax. And finally, when he was becoming excited about Sidney's non-appearance, and resolved one night to sit up for him, as he was positive of his return, Mattie essayed that difficult and delicate task which Sidney had confided to her—a task which Harriet was inclined to take upon herself, and somewhat jealous of Mattie being intrusted with it in her stead.

"He wrote to me the night he left—why didn't he ask me to console his father, I wonder?"

Mattie thought it was for the reason that consolation might be required at any moment, and that Sidney was ignorant of Harriet's intention to stay a few weeks at Great Suffolk Street; but Harriet Wesden on the scene was no reason for Mattie to relinquish her rights. Besides, she had confidence in her own powers of breaking the news; and the unopened death-warrant on the mantle-piece was evidence of Harriet Wesden's rights being at an end.

The story was told by degrees then—what Mr. Sidney had said to Mattie and wished her to do—told with a gentleness and earnestness which did credit to Mattie's powers, and proved what a thoughtful, gentle woman she was becoming. Under the circumstances, also, she made the best of it; and though Mr. Hinchford pulled at his stock, and ruffled his white hair, and took a long while to understand it, yet it was a successful revelation.

"Always considerate Mr. Sidney is," said Mattie, in conclusion; "most sons would have spoken out the truth at once, and gone away leaving their fathers wholly miserable; he went at the subject like a daughter almost—didn't he, Sir?"

Mr. Hinchford had felt inclined to believe himself treated childishly, till Mattie put the question in this new light.

"Ah! he did—" he burst forth with; "he's a dear lad! What a lucky girl that Harriet Wesden is!"

Time passed on, and no Sidney's return. The nights drew in closer yet, and with their lengthier darkness deepened the shadows round the lives of all our characters. Sidney had stated his intention to write no letters, but they were expected nevertheless; and Harriet began to fancy that it was a little strange—as strange as her interest in Sidney and his movements, now that she had given him up forever! A letter for herself from Miss Eveleigh diverted her attention somewhat—it had been sent to Camberwell and posted on by her father.

"Miss Eveleigh is very anxious to see me for a few minutes," said Harriet. "She and her mother think of getting up some private theatricals at New Cross, and they want my assistance and advice."

"Private theatricals!—that's playing at being actors and actresses, isn't it, Miss Harriet?"

"Oh yes. Such capital fun!"

"For the people who come to see you as well?" asked Mattie, guessing by intuition where the shoe must pinch.

"To be sure," responded Harriet; "they wouldn't come if they did not like, my dear; and the change will do me good, and I think I'll go."

Mattie detected a heightened color in Harriet's cheek.

"You will see Mr. Darcy there?"

"Well, perhaps I shall," said Harriet; "and I have a right to think about him now, or let him think about me, if he will. Mattie, you don't mind me going?"

"Mind!—why have I a right to stop you?"

"No; only I shall leave you all alone with that wearisome old man."

"He'll not weary me. Old friends never do."

"That sounds like a reproach, but you don't mean it, Mattie," said Harriet; "and, after all, I shall not be very long away. I shall take the train from London Bridge, and be there and back by eight o'clock."

Harriet hurried away to dress for her expedition; she came down in a flutter of high spirits, a very different being from the despondent, lackadaisical girl of a few weeks since. She had made up her mind to begin life and love afresh; uncertainty was over with her, and she was as gay and bright as the sunshine. But hers was a nature fit only for sunshine—the best and most lovable of girls when the shadows of everyday life were not cast on her track.

"By eight o'clock, Mattie; good-by, my dear. Any advice?" she asked, pausing, with a saucy look about her mouth.

"Yes. Don't fall too deeply in love with Mr. Darcy before you are sure that he is falling in love with you!"

"I can bring him to my feet with a look," she said; "bring him home here with a chain round his neck, like an amiable terrier."

"Let me have an opportunity of admiring your choice soon—we're all in the dark at present."

"Yes, father and mother too, until poor Sid," suddenly becoming grave, "breaks the seal of that letter it gave me gray hairs to write. Upon my word, Mattie, I found two in my head when I had finished it. I was so dreadfully shocked!"

"Well, the troubles are over."

"I think so—I hope so. Good-by, my dear. Tell father where I have gone, if he should look in to-night. Home very early!"

She fluttered away, pausing to look in at the window and laugh through at Mattie once more.

"Perhaps it was as well she gave Sidney up," Mattie thought; "for she has been happier since, and all her dear bright looks are back again. What a wonderful man this Mr. Darcy must be! How I should like to see my darling's choice—the man that she thinks good enough for her! He must be a very good man, too; for with all her weakness my Harriet despises de-

ceit in any form, and would only love that which was honorable and true. But, then, why didn't she love Sidney Hinchford more? that's what puzzles me so dreadfully!"

She clutched her elbows with her hands, and bent herself into a Mother Bunch-like figure in the seat behind the counter, and went off into dream-land. Strange dream-land, belonging to the border-country of the mists lying between the present and the future. A land of things beyond the present, and yet which could never appertain to any future, map it as she might in the brain that went to work so busily. Figures flitted before her of Harriet and Mr. Darcy—of Sidney Hinchford in his desolation, so strange a contrast to the happiness which he had sought—of herself passing from one to the other and endeavoring to do good and make others happy, the one ambition of this generous little heart. And her sanguine nature wound up the story—if it were a story—with the general happiness of all her characters, just as we finish a story, if we wish to please our readers and win their patronage. Even Mr. Wesden would sink his suspicions in the deep water, and be the grave-faced, but kind-hearted patron again, in that border country wherein her thoughts were wandering.

Mr. Hinchford came home early to give her a lesson in backgammon, and was sadly disappointed to find Mattie on full duty in the shop that evening. He wandered about the shop himself for a while, and then went up stairs early to bed, discontented with his lonely position in society; and his place was taken by Ann Packet, who had got "the creeps," and had a craving for "company." Ann Packet's ankles were very bad again, and it was dull work mourning over their decadence in the kitchen, with no one to pity her condition, or promise to call upon her, when she was carried to "St. Tummas's." Even she went to bed early also; for the customers came in frequently, and kept Mattie's attention employed, and it was scarcely worth while sitting in a draught on the shop steps, for the chance of getting in a word now and then, not to mention the probability of Mr. Wesden turning up, and scolding her for coming into the shop at all, an act he had never allowed in his time.

At eight o'clock Mattie was left alone to superintend business; the supper tray for her and Harriet was left upon the parlor table by Ann Packet; in a few minutes Harriet would be back again.

At half past eight Mattie went to the door to watch her coming up the street—a habit with nervous people who would expedite the arrival of the loved one by these means. The action reminded her of Mr. Hinchford, when Sidney was late, and when a few rain-drops were blown toward her by a restless wind abroad that night, the remembrance of waiting for Sidney Hinchford startled her. "Just such a night as this when we sat up for him, and he came home at last, so wild and stern—when we had almost given up the hope of coming home at all—what a strange coincidence!" thought Mattie.

When the rain came suddenly and heavily down the coincidence was more remarkable; and when the clock scored nine, then half past, then ten, it was the old suspense again.

"What nonsense!" thought Mattie; "she's

stopping up for the rain. It is not very late, and I am only fanciful as usual. Nothing can be wrong; it's not likely!"

Those customers who strayed in still wondered why she looked so often at the clock, and stared so vacantly at them when they expressed their verdict on the weather; and the policeman on duty outside observed her frequent visits to the door, and her wild gaze down the street toward the Borough. Yes, the old story over again—an absent friend, an anxious watcher, a night of wind and rain in Suffolk Street. The boy came to close the shop as usual, the door was shut *ex regle*, and now it was Harriet's time to come back, rain or no rain, mystery or no mystery with her, and end the story *à la Sidney Hinchford*.

Mattie consulted a Bradshaw from the window, and found that the New Cross trains ran as late as twelve o'clock to London. This relieved her: Harriet was only waiting for the rain to clear up after all. But even midnight dragged its way toward her; and then the time passed in which she should have returned, and still no Harriet.

At one o'clock Mattie went to the door and looked out. The pavement was glistening yet, but the rain had abated, and the clouds were breaking up overhead. There had been nothing to stop her, even if Mattie had believed for a moment that Harriet would have staid away for the rain. When she gave her up—when it was close on two o'clock—the stars were shining brightly again, although the air felt damp and cold.

"She'll never come back any more!" moaned Mattie; "she has met with danger—I am sure of it. She has come to harm, and I am powerless to help her. I should not feel like this if something had not happened."

"Two," struck the clock of St. George's, Southwark; in the stillness of the streets it echoed toward her, and sounded like a death-bell. Mattie covered her face with her hands, and prayed silently for help for one away from home. Then she sprang up again, piled some more coals on the fire, stirred it, and sat down before it.

"I'll not believe any of these horrible things yet a while. It will all be explained; she'll be back presently to laugh at me for this foolishness!"

CHAPTER X.

MATTIE IN SEARCH.

How does the time contrive to steal away from us when we are sitting up, feverish with fear for him or her who returns not? The dial that we stare at so often marks fresh hours, and still further alarms us; but the night is long and tedious, and there's a stab in every tick of that sepulchral clock on the landing. We disguise our alarm from the servants, even from ourselves, and sit down patiently for the coming one—nervous at the footfalls in the streets without, and feeling heart-sick as they pass our door and die away in the distance. We set our books and newspapers aside at last, and wait; we give up pretension to coolness, and watch with our hearts also.

Mattie waited, tried to hope, then to pray

again; gave up wholly after three in the morning, and cried as for one lost to her forever. There was a reasonable hope in Harriet having missed the train, or in her having been induced to stay the night at the Eveleighs'; a reasonable fear—in these times of railway mismanagement and error—of an accident having occurred to the up-train. But these hopes and fears were not Mattie's; they flashed by her once or twice, but she felt that Harriet's absence was not to be accounted for by them. At four in the morning she took the big key from the lock, put on her bonnet and shawl, and then paused on the stairs, hesitating in her mind whether to apprise Ann Packet of her new intention or not.

Ann Packet would hear a knock if Harriet returned, which was unlikely now; she would not alarm Ann, or betray her friend unnecessarily. It might be necessary, who knows, to keep this ever a secret; she could not tell, all was mystery, dark and unfathomable.

"It's not a runaway match, either," thought Mattie, "for there was no occasion to run away. When Harriet and her lover could have married quietly and without any opposition, at least on their side. Harriet knows that, and is not a girl to be led away if she did not. Weak in many ways, but not in that, I know."

Mattie disliked mystery.

"I'll follow this to the end!" she cried with a stamp of her foot—"to the very end if possible."

Mattie might have been spelling over a sensation novel, wherein the hero or heroine—i. e., the villain catcher—goes through the last two volumes on the detective principle; and it might have possibly struck her that if the "catcher" had started earlier and gone a less roundabout way to work—certainly a bad way for the volumes!—the matter might have been more expeditiously arranged. She could always see to the end pretty clearly—why not the 'cute-minded party in search?

Mattie closed the street-door behind her, and went out into the cold morning. The pavement was still wet and clammy; there was no "drying-air" in the streets, although the stars looked bright and aggravatingly frosty.

Mattie turned to the left at the end of Great Suffolk Street, and proceeded at a rapid pace toward the railway station; there were stragglers still in the Borough—a broad thoroughfare, that never rests, but is ever alive with sound. Life still at the great terminus; a train hissing and fuming from its long journey, a handful of passengers by the mail, a few cabmen still looking out for fares, guards full of bustle as usual, one Kent Street gamin out on business, and dodging the policeman behind a Patent Safety.

Mattie went to business at once.

"Has any accident happened on the line tonight, Sir?"

"Not any."

"What is the next train from New Cross that will reach here?"

"No train calls at New Cross till six in the morning."

"What is the next train that will leave here and call at New Cross?"

"Twenty minutes to six."

"Oh dear!"

A short spasmodic sigh, and then Mattie

turned away and went back to Great Suffolk Street, opened the door, and stole cautiously up stairs to the room wherein Harriet had been sleeping. Not there—still away from home!

"If any thing has happened, I must be the first to find it out," thought Mattie, descending the stairs, listening at the foot thereof, and then passing out into the street again, closing the shop-door very cautiously behind her.

She had made up her mind to walk at once to New Cross, to seek out the Eveleighs, whose address she thought that she remembered. She went on at a rapid pace, with her veil thrown back, and her face full of interest; not a woman in the streets, hurrying like herself on special missions, or lurking at street corners, but Mattie glanced at for an instant as she sped along. She was a quick walker and lost no time; after all, New Cross was not a great distance away; she was not easily tired, and once in action, her fears for Harriet went further into the distance. She began to think, almost to hope, that Harriet would be at the Eveleighs', and all would end with a wild fancy on her part, at which Harriet and she would laugh later in the day. Down the Dover Road, past the Bricklayer's Arms, and along the Old Kent Road, till the long lines of closed shops ended in long lines of private houses, the railway station and the Royal Naval School—that model of good management, by which we recommend all directors of seedy institutions to profit.

Near the railway station Mattie found a policeman, who directed her to the particular terrace wherein the Eveleighs were located. It was nearly half past five when she read by the light of the street-lamp the name of Eveleigh on the brass plate affixed to the iron gate. With her hands upon the gate Mattie held a council of war with herself as to the best method of procedure.

Mattie had soon arranged her plan of action; hers was a mind that jumped rapidly at conclusions—was quick to see the best way. Arousing the house would create an alarm, and if Harriet were not there—of which in her heart she was already assured—it would only set the people within talking about her. That would be to cast the first stone at her poor friend, and set the tongues of gossips wagging: that must not be. Mattie resolved to wait till some signs about the Eveleigh window-blinds indicated a servant stirring in the house. She thought with a shudder of the shop in Great Suffolk Street, and the customers waiting for their papers; of Ann Packet's alarm, and Mr. Hinchford's perplexity; of the food for scandal which her absence would afford to a few inquisitive neighbors. Still all that might be easily explained, and it was only she who would receive the blame, if all turned out better than she dreamed; and if the worst were known, why, alas! her actions would readily be guessed at.

Fortune favored Mattie in the most unromantic way that morning: the Eveleighs had resolved upon having their kitchen chimney swept at half past five, and young Erebus, true to the minute, came round the corner with his soot-bag, went up the fore-court toward the side gate, rang the bell, and gave vent to his doleful cry. The maid-servant, however, was not prompt in her responses, and Mattie stood and watched

in the distance, until the sweep, becoming impatient, rang again, and rattled with his brush against the side of the door-steps. From Mattie's post of vigilance she could just make him out in the darkness—a shadowy figure, that might have represented evil to her and hers.

Presently the bolts of the side gate were withdrawn, and Mattie with hasty steps crossed the road and hurried up the path. The sweep was being admitted at that time, and a red-eyed, white-faced, sulky-looking servant-maid of not more than sixteen years of age was closing the door when Mattie called to her to wait.

Surprised at this strange apparition at so early an hour the girl waited and stared.

Mattie's plan of action would have done credit to a detective policeman; her questions seemed so wide of the mark, and kept suspicion back from her whom she loved so well. Certainly they implicated another, and drew attention to him in a marked manner. But he was a man, and could bear it, thought Mattie, and if he were at the bottom of the mystery there was no need to study him—rather to track him out and come face to face with him.

"Will you tell Mr. Darcy that I wish to speak a few words with him immediately?"

"Mr. Darcy don't live here," said the astonished servant.

"He visits here; he staid here last night."

"No, he didn't," was the abrupt reply; "he went away at ten o'clock."

"With Miss Wesden, of course," was the apparently careless answer.

"Yes, with Miss Wesden. He never stops here."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know; somewhere about here, I believe."

"Ask his address of your mistress," cried Mattie, becoming excited as the truth seemed to loom before her with all its horror; "I must see him!"

The servant-maid's eyes became rounder, and she gasped forth—

"I'll—I'll wake missus."

"Ask her to oblige me with Mr. Darcy's address—and please make haste."

The servant withdrew, leaving Mattie standing in the draughty side-passage, dark and dense as the fate of her whom she loved appeared to be from that day. She could hear the sweep bustling and bundling about the kitchen noisily; it seemed an age before the servant's feet came clumping down the stairs again.

"It's number fourteen St. Olave's Terrace, Old Kent Road."

"Thank you."

Mattie turned away, and ran down the fore-court at a rapid pace.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated the amazed domestic. "What's Mr. Darcy gone and done, I wonder?"

Mattie darted backward on her homeward route; her plans of action were at sea now; she only wished to know the worst, and feel the strength to face it for others' sakes, not for her own. There were an old man and an old woman to comfort in their latter days, to become a daughter to in the place of her who had been spirited away—give her strength to solace them in the deep misery upon its way.

People were stirring in the streets, although the day was dark and the sky above still full of stars. Mattie made many inquiries, and at last found St. Olave's Terrace, a row of large, gloomy houses of red brick. At No. 14 Mattie knocked long and vigorously, until a window was opened in the first-floor, and a boy's head protruded—the unkempt head of a page.

"What's the row down there?" he shouted.

"Mr. Darcy—is he at home?"

"He ain't at home; he didn't come back last night."

"Are you sure?—are you quite sure?"

"I should think I was," replied young Impudence. "Who shall I say called—Walker?"

"No matter—no matter."

Mattie turned and hurried away again. Close upon six o'clock, and an empty cab before a public-house door. Mattie ran into the public house, and found the cabman drinking neat gin at the bar and bewailing the hardness of the times to the barman, who was yawning fearfully.

"Is your cab engaged?"

"Where do you want to go, Miss?" asked the cabman. "If it's Greenwich way, I've got a party to take up in five minutes' time."

"Suffolk Street, Borough. I—I don't mind what I pay to get there quickly."

"Jump in, Miss; I'll drive you there in no time."

Mattie entered the cab, the cabman mounted the box, and away they went down the Old Kent Road. The cabman had been up all night, calling at many night-houses in his route, and always taking gin with dispatch and gusto. He was reckless with his whip, unmerciful to his horse, and disregardful of the cab, which he had out on hire. He was just intoxicated enough to be confidential, mysterious, and sympathizing. He lowered the glass window at his back, and looked through at Mattie.

"Lor bless you! I wouldn't cry about a bit of a spree," he said, suddenly, so close to Mattie's ear that she jumped to the other seat with affright; "if you've kep' it up late, tell your missus, or your mother, that they wouldn't let you leave afore: she was young herself once, I dare say."

"Drive on, please; drive on."

"I'm driving my hardest, my child; cutting off all the corners—that's only a kub-stone, don't be frightened, m'child; soon be home now. They won't say much to you if you'll on'y tell 'em that they was young once 'emselves, and shouldn't be too hard upon a gal—that's on'y another kub-stone," he explained again, as a sudden jolting nearly brought the bottom out of the cab; "we sha'n't be long now; don't cry any more; I hope this here'll be a blessed warning to you!"

And suddenly becoming stern and full of reproof, he shook his head at Mattie, drew up the window, and directed his whole attention to his quadruped, which he had evidently made up his mind to cut in half between Old Kent Road and Great Suffolk Street.

At half past six Mattie was turning the corner of the well-known street. She looked from the cab-window toward the stationer's shop. The shutters were closed still, but the news-boy was at the open door, muffled to the nose in his worsted comforter. Mattie sprang out, paid her

fare, and ran into the shop, where Ann Packet, with her eyes red with weeping, rushed at her at once, and began to cry and shake her.

"Oh! Mattie, Mattie, where *have* you been?—what's the matter?"

"Nothing much; don't ask me just yet. How long have you been up?"

"I overslept myself—oh! dear, dear, dear!—and just got up in a fright, that boy skanking me so with the heels of his boots against the door. And oh! dear, dear, dear! I found the shop all dark, and just let him in, and was going up to call you, when here you are. Oh! where *have* you been?"

"I'll tell you presently; let me think a bit. I'm not well, Ann."

"You've been to a doctor's. Oh! my dear, my dear, what has happened to you? You came back in a cab; you've hurt yourself somehow, and I to be so unfeeling and wicked as to think that—that you'd gone out of your mind, perhaps, for you always was a strange gal, and like nobody else, wasn't you? Shall I run up stairs and wake Miss Harriet?"

"No, no; *not for the world!* Go down stairs and make haste with the coffee, Ann, please. And you, boy, don't stare like that," snapped Mattie, "but take the shutters down."

Ann scuttled down stairs, forgetful of her ankles in her excitement at the novel position of affairs; the boy took down the shutters and disclosed the cabman still before the door, carefully examining his horse, and rather evilly disposed toward himself for the damage he had done the animal and cab in his excitement. Mattie went into the parlor, where the gas burned still, and stood by the table reflecting on the end—what was to be done now?—whether it were better to keep up the mystery, to allege some reason for Harriet's absence, frame some white lie that might keep Ann Packet and Mr. Hinchford appeased, and save *her* name for a short while longer?

When the boy came staggering in with the third shutter, a new thought—a forlorn hope—suggested itself.

"Wait here and mind the shop till I come down, William," she said.

She went up stairs in her bonnet and shawl, and pushed open the door of Harriet Wesden's room. Empty and unoccupied, as she might have known, and yet which, in defiance of possibilities, she had gone up to explore again. The blind was undrawn, and the faint glimmer of the late dawning was stealing into the room, and scaring the shadows back.

Mattie gave way at the desolation of the place; and flung herself upon her knees at the bed's foot.

"Oh! my darling, God forgive you, and watch over you—oh! my darling, whom I loved more than a sister, and who is forever—forever—lost to me!"

"No—no—Mattie!"

Mattie leaped to her feet, and with a cry scarcely human, rushed toward the speaker in the doorway—the speaker who, white and trembling, opened her arms and received her on her throbbing breast. Harriet Wesden had come back again!

CHAPTER XI.

EXPLANATIONS.

MATTIE shed many tears of joy at Harriet's return; she was a strong-minded young woman in her way, but the tension of nerve, and the reaction which followed it, had been too much for her, and she was, for a short while, a child in strength and self-command. For a while they had changed places, Mattie and Harriet; Mattie becoming the agitated and weak girl, Harriet remaining firm, and maintaining an equable demeanor.

"Courage, Mattie! what have you to give way at?" she said, at last.

"There, I'm better now," said Mattie, looking up into Harriet's face, and keeping her hands upon her shoulders; "and now, will you trust in me? Tell me the whole truth—keep nothing back."

"From you—nothing!"

"And if he has been coward enough to lead you away by the snares of your affection—"

"Affection!" cried Harriet. "I hate him! Coward enough!—he is coward enough for any thing that would degrade me, and villain enough to spare no pains to place me in his power. Oh! Mattie, Mattie, what had I done to make him think so meanly of me?—to lead him on to plot against me in so poor and miserable a fashion?"

"You have escaped from him?"

"Thank God, yes!"

Mattie could have cried again for joy, but Harriet's excitement recalled her to self-command—Harriet, who stood there with her whole frame quivering with passion and outraged pride—a woman whom Mattie had not seen till then.

"Mattie," she said, "that man, Maurice Darcy, thought that if I were weak enough to love him I was weak enough to fly with him, forget my woman's pride, my father, home, honor, and fling all away for his sake. He did not know me, or understand me; my God! he did not think that there were any good thoughts in me, or he would not have acted as he did. I have been blind—I have been a fool until to-night!"

She stamped her foot upon the floor until every thing in the room vibrated; she caught Mattie's inquiring, earnest looks toward her and went on again—

"You and I, Mattie, must keep this ever a secret between us; for my sake, I am sure you will—for the sake of my good name, which that man's trickery has tarnished, however completely I have baffled him and shamed him. Mattie, he was at the Eveleighs' last night with his guilty plans matured. I had every confidence in him and his affection for me. I was off my guard, and believed that he was free from guile himself. At ten o'clock—beyond my time—I left the Eveleighs'; he was my escort to the railway station; he spoke of his love for me for the first time, and I was agitated and blinded by his seeming fervor. I told him of my promise to Sidney, and what I had done for his sake. I led him to think—fool that I was—that he had won my love long since. At the railway station he told me the story of his life—a lie from beginning to end—of his father's pride, of the secrecy with which our future marriage must be kept for a while, away from that father—talking, protest-

ing, explaining, until the train came up and he had placed me in the carriage."

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed Mattie.

"He followed me at the last moment, stating that he had business in London, and then the train moved on—FOR DOVER!"

"Yes, he was a villain and coward!" cried Mattie, setting her teeth and clenching her hands spasmodically. "Go on!"

"In less than five minutes I was aware of the deception that he had practiced on me. I woke suddenly to the whole truth, to my own folly in believing in this man. He would have feigned it to be a mistake at first—a mistake on his own part; and for my own safety, alone with him there, and the train shrieking along into the night, I professed to believe him, and mourned over the clumsy blunder which was taking us away from home; but I was on my guard, and my reserve, my alarm, kept him cautious. I sat cowering from him in the extreme corner of the carriage, and he sat maturing his plans, and marking out, as he thought, his way. He confessed at last that it was a deeply-laid scheme to secure what he called his happiness. He swore to be a brother to me, a faithful friend in whom every trust might be put until we were married at Calais; but the mask had dropped, and my heart, throbbing with my humiliation, had turned utterly against him. I lowered the carriage window and sat watchful of him, knowing every word he uttered then to be a lie, and feeling that he looked upon me as a girl easily to be led astray—a shop-keeper's daughter, whose self-respect was quickly deadened, and whose vanity was sufficient to lead her on to ruin. But I bade him keep his seat away from me, and give me time to think of what he had said—time to believe in him! We were silent the rest of the way to Ashford. My throat was choking with the angry words which burned to leap forth and denounce him for his knavery—he who sat smiling at the success in store for him. At Ashford, thank God! the train stopped."

"Thank God!" whispered Mattie also.

"I opened the door suddenly, Mattie, and leaped forth like a madwoman; he followed me to the platform, when I turned upon him like—like a she-wolf!" she cried, vehemently, "and denounced him for the cowardly wretch he had been to me. There were a few guards about, and one gentleman, and they were my audience. I claimed their protection from the man; I told them how I had been tricked into that train and led away from home; I ask them, if they had daughters whom they loved, to protect me and send me back again secure from him. Mattie, I shamed him to his soul!"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Mattie, giving two leaps in the air in her excitement; "that's my own darling, whose heart was ever strong and true enough!"

"Only her head a little weak, and likely to be turned—eh, Mattie?" said Harriet, in a less excited strain. "Well, I am sobered now forever, and every scrap of romantic feeling has been torn to shreds. I must have been under a spell, for it seems like an evil dream now that I could ever have thought of loving that man."

"And they took your part at the station?"

"Yes, and gave me advice, and were kind to me, and he who attempted to deceive me skulk-

ed back into the carriage, muttering a hundred excuses, which I did not hear. The gentleman who had listened to my story, and been prepared to defend me, had it been necessary, followed Mr. Darcy to the carriage, added a few stern words, and then returned to offer me advice how to proceed. He was a strange, eccentric man, very harsh even with me in his speech, and disposed to preach a sermon on the warning I had had, as though I were not likely to take a lesson from my over-confidence, after all that had happened. But he was very kind in act, and meant all for my good, though he might have spared me just a little more. He consulted the railway time-tables for me, made many inquiries of the guards, whom he appeared to disbelieve, for he went back to the time-tables again; finally told me that there was no train till a quarter past five by which I could reach home. He showed me a hotel adjacent to the station, and left me there, after again upbraiding me for my want of judgment; and at a quarter past five—what an age it seemed before that time came round!—I left Ashford once again for home."

"And are here safe from danger, to make my heart light again with the sight of you. Well, my dear, we'll think it all an ugly dream, and shut *him* away in it forever."

"And now, what will the world think of me? How much of the story will it believe, Mattie?" was the scornful answer.

"What will the world know of it? You and I can keep the secret between us. Mr. Darcy will not boast of his humiliation. The old people need not be harassed and perplexed by all that has happened this night."

"No, no; all an ugly dream, as you say, Mattie," remarked Harriet; "perhaps it is best, and a woman's fame is hard to establish on her own explanation of such a history as mine. Let it sink. I am verily ashamed of it. My blood will boil at every chance allusion that associates itself with last night. Oh! my poor, dear, truthful Sid, to think of turning away from you, and believing in a heartless villain!"

"Ah, Sidney!" exclaimed Mattie.

"Whatever happens—whatever the future may bring—that letter, Mattie, must be destroyed. It is a false statement. We must secure it and destroy it. With time before me, and the dark memory shut out, how I will love that faithful heart!"

"Trust the letter to me; trust—Oh! the shop, the shop all this while! And I haven't told you my story."

"Presently, then, Mattie. I would go down now."

"Yes, I will go down. I have been very neglectful of business in my joy at seeing you again. It did not seem possible a few hours ago that all would have ended fairly like this. I am so happy—so very happy now, dear Harriet!"

She shook Harriet by both hands, kissed her once more, and even cried a little before she made a hasty dash from the room to the stairs. At the second landing, outside Mr. Hinchford's apartments, she remembered the letter—the evidence of Harriet's past romance in which Sidney Hinchford played no part.

Mattie pictured the future as very bright and glowing after this; the two who had been ever kind to her, and helped so greatly toward her

better life, would come together after all, and make the best and truest couple in the world!

Mattie's training—moral training it may be called—was scarcely a perfect one. She had been taught what was honest and truthful; she was far away forever from the old life; but the fine feelings—the sensitiveness to the *minutiae* of goodness—were wanting just then. The means to the end were not particularly to be studied, so that the end was good. Harriet had done no wrong; merely been duped by a specious scam for a while; but keep the story dark for the sake of the suspicions it cast on minds inclined to doubt good in any thing, and for the sake of general peace make away with the letter—Sidney Hinchford's property as much as the lock she stole from him when she was eleven years of age.

Harriet Wesden was silent from fear and shame; her nature was a timid one, and shrunk back from painful avowals. Mattie did not look at the subject in the best light, and thought of promoting happiness by secrecy, a dangerous experiment, that may tend at any moment to an explosion. Mattie opened the drawing-room door softly and looked in. Mr. Hinchford had not appeared yet, and she entered and went direct to the mantle-piece, on which the letter had lain ever since its arrival. The letter was gone!

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! what's to be done now?" cried Mattie, looking from the centre-table to the side-table on which was Sidney's desk, unlocked. Mattie did not think of appearances when she opened the desk and began turning over its contents with a hasty hand—a suspicious-looking operation, in which she was discovered by Mr. Hinchford, who entered the room suddenly.

"Mattie," he said, sternly, "I should not have thought that you would have been guilty of this meanness."

Mattie, with her bonnet and shawl on, and awry from her past movements, with her face pale and haggard from want of sleep, remained with her hands in the desk, looking hard at the new-comer. Her instinct was to tell the truth; there was no harm in it.

"I am looking for the letter which came for Mr. Sidney; I want it back."

"Want it back!—what letter?"

"The letter which has been on the mantle-piece all the week. It was Miss Harriet's. She wishes to have it back, to put something else in it."

"Bless my soul!—very odd," said Mr. Hinchford; "I'll give it to Miss Harriet myself—there's no occasion to rummage my boy's desk about. I don't like it, Mattie; I am extremely displeased."

"I am very sorry," said Mattie, submissively; "I did not think what I was doing. And you will give the letter to Miss Harriet?"

"It's in the breast-pocket of my coat. I'll give it her."

Mattie cowered before the flushed face, and the stern look thereon: this man was a friend of hers, too—one of the rescuers!—whom she would always bear in kind remembrance. She went softly across the room to the door, veering suddenly round to lay her hands upon his arm.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Hinchford," she said; "it was all done without a moment's thought."

You, for the first time in your life, will not be angry with me?"

"No, no, no, no," repeated the old gentleman, taken aback by this appeal, and softening at once; "I don't suppose you meant any thing wrong, Mattie."

"Thank you." Mattie went down stairs in a better frame of mind, and yet ashamed at having been detected in a crooked action by a gentleman who always spoke so much of straightforwardness, and had a son who excelled in that difficult accomplishment. She was vexed at the impulse now—what would any man less generous in his ideas have thought of her?

"Never mind," was Mattie's consolation, "I meant no harm—I meant well. And all will end well now, and every body be so happy! What a change from the terrible thoughts of only a few hours ago!"

She could think of nothing but Harriet Wesden's safety, and her own minor *escapade* was of little consequence. Thinking of Harriet again, and rejoicing in the brighter thoughts which the last hours had brought with them, she opened the door at the foot of the stairs and went at once into the shop.

Mr. Wesden was standing behind the counter, waiting upon a customer, as though he had never left Great Suffolk Street, and retiring from business had been only a dream.

CHAPTER XII.

A SHORT WARNING.

MATTIE stood in her disordered walking-dress, gazing at the stationer, for whose presence she could not account. Mr. Wesden looked across the counter at her.

"Will you go into the parlor, please?" he said at last.

"In the parlor! Ye-es, Sir."

There was something wrong—radically and irretrievably wrong this time; however greatly Mr. Wesden had changed, he had never looked so strangely or spoken so harshly as he did at that time. Even the customer whom he was serving, and who knew Mattie, turned round and glanced also in her direction.

"Robbery!—there—there's been no more robbery!" gasped Mattie, her thoughts darting off at a tangent in the direction of her old trouble.

"You can go into the parlor," he repeated, as harshly as before; "I'll be with you in a minute."

Mattie went into the parlor, took off the bonnet and shawl that she had so long forgotten, and which must have added to Mr. Wesden's perplexity, and then sat down, with her face toward the shop, to await her master's pleasure—and displeasure! There was trouble in store for her—perhaps for Harriet—Mr. Wesden had discovered a great deal, and she had to bear the first shock of the storm. She could see Mr. Wesden's face from her position; even at that distance it seemed as if the innumerable lines in it had been cut deeper since she had seen it last, and the heavy gray brows shadowed more completely the eyes. He was not his usual self either; the quick glance of the watcher noticed

how his hands shook as he served the customer, and that he fumbled with the change in a manner very new and uncharacteristic for him. His habits, or his caution, had even undergone a change; for, as the news-boy came in at the street-door, he told him to go behind the counter and attend to the customers till he returned. Then he entered the parlor, still flushed and trembling, yet so stern, and leaned his two hands on the table till it creaked beneath the pressure which he put upon it.

"Mattie," he said at last, "I think it's quite time that you and I said good-by to one another!"

"Oh! Sir!—*what?*" Mattie could only ejaculate.

"I've been thinking it over for some time—putting it off—giving you another trial—hoping that I was even mistaken in you; but things get worse and worse, and this last news is a settler!"

"Mr. Wesden, there must be some mistake."

"No, there isn't—don't interrupt me—don't make any more excuses, for I sha'n't believe 'em."

"Go on, Sir," said Mattie, impetuously; "I don't understand."

"You need not fly in a passion, if you don't," he corrected.

"I'm not in a passion, Mr. Wesden—you *will* think wrongly of me."

"Just listen to this—just deny this if you can. You left my house in the middle of the night—you have been up all night, and God knows where—you did not come back to this house—you, who have no friends to go to—until half past six o'clock this morning."

Mattie sat thunder-struck at this charge, so true in its assertion, and yet the suspicions which it led to so easily refuted, or—she drew a long breath and held her peace at the thought—so easily transferred!

"You can't deny this," continued Mr. Wesden, in the same hard manner; "how long it's been going on, or what bad company has led you astray, I can't say. But you haven't acted like a young woman who meant well; you've been getting worse and worse with every day."

"It's not true!" cried Mattie, indignantly; "I—"

She paused again.

"Ah! don't give me excuses," he said; "I'm an old man who knows the world, and won't believe in them. I wouldn't believe in my own daughter, if she acted as you have done, or was ever so ready at excuses. No honest girl—I'm sorry to say it, Mattie—would ever, without a fair reason, be walking the streets, friendless and alone, at such unnatural hours."

"Will you not believe me, when I tell you truly, without a blush in my face, that as God's my judge, I went out with a motive of which even you would approve?"

"What was it?"

"I—I can not tell you that yet. Presently, perhaps—if you will only give me time—not now."

Mr. Wesden shook his head.

"Mattie," he replied, "it won't do! It isn't what I've been used to, and I can't wait till you have invented a story and—"

"Invented!" shrieked Mattie, leaping to her feet, "what more!—what more have you to

charge an innocent girl, who has thought of nothing but serving you honestly from the time you took pity on her wretchedness? You have turned against me; if you are tired of me, tell me so plainly—but don't talk as if I were a liar and a thief still—I will not have it!"

"You put a bold face upon it, and that's a bad sign," said Mr. Wesden; "where there's no shame, only bounce, it takes away all the pity of the thing, and makes me firmer."

The table creaked once more with the extra pressure of his hands; the flush died away from the face, whereon settled an expression more steely and invulnerable.

"Oh, Sir, how you have altered! What do you think that I have done?" cried the perplexed Mattie.

"See here," said Mr. Wesden; "I don't wish to rake up every thing, but as you put it to me, I'll just show you how foolish it is to brave it out like this. I'm very sorry; I can't make it out, altering for the better as you had. It's bad company, I suppose. First," he removed his hands from the table, and began checking off the items on his fingers, "there's money missing up stairs—a cash-box opened, and only—"

"My God! has that thought rankled so long?" interrupted Mattie; "I don't wonder at the rest, if you begin like that with me. I'll go away; I'll go away!"

"It didn't rankle; I gave you the benefit of the doubt," said Mr. Wesden; "I wouldn't believe it, but I fancied that you were altering, and that something was wrong somewhere. It looked at least as if you were careless, and I thought the house might get robbed, or catch fire, or any thing after that, and it disturbed my mind much. I couldn't sleep for thinking of you; and one night I came over here very late, and you were up talking and laughing with a young man in the shop in the dead of night."

"That, too!" cried Mattie; "do you suspect him?"

"I suspected you, that's enough to say just now."

"More than enough," was the bitter answer.

"And then a parcel disappears, and there's a lame excuse for that; and a policeman finds you in Kent Street at a receiver's house—the house of a noted thief, that you must have known long ago—"

"I went there—but no matter, you'll not believe me," said Mattie.

"And so I was obliged to have you watched for my own protection's sake, and you were seen to leave the house last night, and come back in a cab after the shop was open. And if all that's not enough to drive a business-man wild, why, I never was a man fit for business at all."

Mattie gathered up her bonnet and shawl from the chair on which they had been placed, and proceeded to put them on again, keeping her dark eyes fixed on Mr. Wesden's face.

"There's only one thing which I'll agree with, Sir," she said, her voice faltering despite her effort to keep firm, "and that's the first speech you made me. It's quite time that you and I said 'good-by' to one another."

"Well, it is."

"I don't know whether you wish it or not, I don't care, but I will go away at once, trusting in Him whom your wife taught me first to pray

to. I will go away without anger in my heart against you; for oh! you have been very good and kind to me, and I shall be grateful again when to-day's hard words go further and further back. I will hope in the time when you will know all, and be sorry that you lost your trust in me so soon. Better to doubt me than—others."

She corrected herself in time; she remembered her promise to Harriet. She saw how easy it was for a few errors, a few mistakes, to make this strange man forget all the good efforts of a life. Deceived in Mr. Wesden as she had been, she could not gauge in those excited moments the depths of his affection for his daughter.

In the avowal there would be danger to Harriet; so, for Harriet's sake, let her take the blame and go away. Harriet could only have cleared up the last mystery; the rest affected herself. She had had never more than half a character; she rose from crime, and its antecedents rose again with her at the first suspicion against her truthful conduct. It was very hard to go away, but it was her only step, and he wished it also—he, who had been almost a father to her until then.

"I'll pack my box and leave at once, Sir, if you don't mind."

"No," was the gloomy response.

He was deceived in Mattie still. He had hoped that she would have confessed to every thing, to the new and awful temptations that had beset her lately, and prayed for his mercy and forgiveness—begged for his help and moral strength to lead her from the dark road she was pursuing. He was disappointed by her defiance—by her assumption of an innocence in which he could not believe; and he could only see that her plans were too readily formed, and that she had already fixed upon her future associates and home. He was amazed at her way of encountering his charges; and as he had been only a business-man all his life, he could not understand her.

Mattie left the room, and he turned into his shop again and dismissed the news-boy from his post of promotion. The matter had worried him, and was still worrying him. The ~~discovery~~ was not satisfactory, and the world was hardening very much, or becoming too complex in its machinery for him. He had found Mattie out, and it had all ended just as he feared it would: and still his head ached and his thoughts perplexed him.

He counted the arrears of Mattie's salary, and put it on the back shelf, ready for her when she came down, knocking it all over the minute afterward, and sending two shillings under the shop-board, where the shutters and gas-meter were. He made mistakes with the next customer in his change, and would not believe it was his error, although he paid the man rather than get into a fresh dispute at that instant; he rummaged from a whole packet of printed notices he dealt in a "THIS SHOP AND BUSINESS TO BE DISPOSED OF," and stuck it with wafers in the window upside down. He would retire from business in earnest, and not make-believe any longer; he should be more composed in mind, more happy, when all this was no longer a burden to him.

He served his customers absently, and wondered—for he was a good and just man at heart—whether he was acting for the best after all;

whether it was quite Christian-like to give up the child whom he had rescued from the cruel streets five years ago come Christmas.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEAVE-TAKINGS.

MATTIE went to her room and packed her box with trembling hands. She was very agitated still; there were many conflicting thoughts to disturb her natural equanimity. Regret at going away from the home wherein had begun her better life; indignation at the false accusations that had been made against her, and made in so hard and uncharitable a fashion; doubts of the future stretching before her, impenetrable and dusky, and the life to begin again in some way, to which she tried to give a thought, even in those early moments, and failed in utterly.

Over her box came honest Ann Packet to ask the latest news—to stare in a vague idiotic way when told it.

"I am going away, Ann—don't you understand?"

"Going away?—no, I don't yet. Going where did you say, Mattie?"

"Going away from here, where I am no longer wanted, where I am suspected of being all that is vile and wrong. Going away for good!"

"Oh! my gracious—not that. Because of last night—because of—"

"Many things, Ann, which I dare not explain, and which, if explained, perhaps would not be believed in by him. But you, Ann—what will you think of me when I'm gone, and they say behind my back how justly I was served?"

"I say?—I say?"

"You'll hear *their* story, and I can't tell you mine. I can only say that since I have been here there's not a bad thought had a place in my mind, and not a good one which I did not try, for *their* sakes as well as my own, to cling to. I can only ask you, Ann—you who have always thought well of me—to keep your faith strong, for poor Mattie's sake."

Ann Packet gave vent to a howl at this—wring her fat red hands together, and then fell upon Mattie's box, as though our heroine had shot her.

"You sha'n't pack up no more!" she screamed; "you can speak to them as to me, and they'll believe you, or they're made of stone. Why, it's a drefful shame to turn you off like this, as though you'd been found out in all that's bad."

"Hush! you'll wake Miss Harriet. I dare say she—she's asleep still!—you will go now, Ann, please. I'm not unhappy—why, here's one, to begin with, who will always think the best of me!"

"The very best—as you've been the very best and the gooddest to me, who used to snap you so at first, and feel jealous like, because they put you over me; but you won't mind that now?"

"No—no."

"And, Mattie, you don't want to go away and see nobody any more—to be quite alone, and hear nothing of any body? I may come and see you?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"And you'll write, and tell me directly where you are?"

"Ah! where I am. Yes, you shall know that first. And when I can prove to him that I have always been honest and true, I'll see him and his again, *not before*."

"And I shall call and tell you all the news—listen at all the keyholes to hear what they've got to talk about."

"I hope not. But get up now, Ann, and go down stairs, or they'll suspect something. I'll send for the box presently, when I'm settled."

Ann rose with clenched hands and swollen eyes.

"If I had the settling of *him*! I—I almost feel to hate him. He's a brute!"

And before Mattie had time to reprove the faithful Ann for the outburst Miss Packet had left the room, and gone down stairs to cry afresh over the breakfast she had to prepare for Mr. Hinchford.

Mattie passed into the other room, and found Harriet Weeden asleep, as she had fancied. The toil of yesternight, the excitement and suspense, had brought their reaction, and Harriet had flung herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, where she had dropped off into slumber.

Mattie stood for a moment irresolute whether to wake her or no; had it been simply to say "good-by," she would have hesitated longer, though she might have awakened her at last.

"Harriet—Harriet!" she whispered, as she bent over her.

The fair girl started up and looked at Mattie.

"What's happened now, dear?"

"Nothing very important," said Mattie, who had determined now to proceed. "I have been thinking of our next step together concerning last night. Your father is down stairs."

"Oh! he must not know it—he must never know it!" exclaimed Harriet; "he is weaker in mind—more excitable, suspicious—what would he think of me keeping the name of Maurice Darcy from him all my life?"

"Harriet, promise me never to tell him—I am not frightened at the truth, but of their perversion of it, destroying forever your good name—promise me!"

"But why promise you, who—"

"Promise it. I am very, very anxious, for your own sake and for mine."

"I promise—I promise faithfully."

"Whatever happens?"

"Yea, whatever happens!"

"I will tell you why now. In the first place, I have found out that the world will never accept *your* statement, but believe the very worst of you."

Harriet shuddered; her own trustfulness in others—her vanity, perhaps, allied thereto—had led her to the verge of the abyss—and "miraculous escapes" are only for penny-a-liners and romancists. She thought that Mattie was right in binding her solemnly to secrecy, and she repeated her promise even more solemnly than before.

"And in the second place—"

Mattie paused; she recoiled from the explanation, the trial of another parting with this girl for whose happiness she was about to sacrifice herself, and the good name for which she had struggled. Harriet looked ill and worn now, and

she could not tell her all the news, her heart was too full.

"I would bathe my hands and face, and go down stairs as soon as possible. It will prevent suspicion, and you *must* stand up against the fatigue for a while."

"Yes, yes, I can do that."

"Nothing can be helped now by confession; remember that when the truth would leap to your lips in a generous impulse, of which hereafter you would be sorry. Good-by now."

Mattie stooped and kissed her. The quivering lips, the tear-brimming eyes, suggested a new trouble, and Harriet detected it at once.

"There is something new, Mattie; don't deceive me."

"Very little; you will know all when you get down stairs; be on your guard; God bless you!"

And Mattie, feeling her voice deserting her, hurried away. She went at once to Mr. Hinchford's room. Mr. Hinchford was becoming fidgety about his breakfast, and walking up and down discontentedly.

"They'll tell me I'm late again," he was muttering, when Mattie, *sans ceremonie*, made her appearance.

"Mr. Hinchford, will you let Miss Harriet have that letter at once? She's waiting for it."

"And I'm waiting for my breakfast, Mattie; it's really too bad!"

"I'll tell Ann; and—the letter?"

"You're an odd girl; I'll get it you."

He went into the next room, returning with a letter in his hand.

"There!"

Mattie dashed at it in her impatience, and tore it into twenty pieces, which she thrust into the pocket of her dress, lest a fragment of the news should remain as evidence of Harriet Wesden's want of judgment.

"I say, my girl, that's not your letter, it's—"

"It's better torn to pieces. Harriet wished it, Sir."

"She—she hasn't had a quarrel with my boy?"

"No, Sir, to be sure not."

"I wonder how much longer he will be; there's—there's nothing further to break to an old man by degrees, Mattie?"

"Nothing further. I have a little news to tell you about myself that I hope you'll be sorry to hear."

Mr. Hinchford's face assumed that perplexed look to which it had become prone of late years. Still he was not likely to be very much troubled—it was only about Mattie!

"I am going away from here," Mattie explained in a hurried manner; "Mr. Wesden will tell you the whole story, and it's not to my credit, looking at it in his light. You'll believe it, perhaps?" she added, wistfully.

"Mr. Wesden is not accustomed to exaggeration, Mattie; but I will not believe any thing that is wrong of you."

"I hope you will not, however proof may seem to go against me," was the sad remark. "He thinks I'm wrong, and I dare not explain part, and can not explain the rest, and so I'm going away this morning."

"This morning!"

Mr. Hinchford took a good haul of his stock at this.

"He don't wish me to stop, and I would not if he did," said Mattie, proudly, "so we are both of one mind about my going. And now, Sir," holding out both hands to him, "try and think the best of me—never mind the desk this morning, that was nothing, remember—do think well of one who will never forget you, and all the kindness you have shown me since I have been here."

"Mattie, let me go down, and see if I can't set all this straight," said the old gentleman, moved by Mattie's appeal.

"It could not be done, Sir," said Mattie in reply. "You're very kind, but I know how much better it is to go. Why, Sir, I have a great hope that they'll think better of me when I am gone!"

"But—but—"

"And so good-by, Sir."

The old gentleman shook both her hands, stooped suddenly and kissed her on the forehead.

"I can't make it all out, but I'll believe the best, Mattie."

"Thank you—thank you."

The tears were blinding her, so she hastened to the door, pausing there to add—

"Tell Mr. Sidney—oh! tell him above all—to think of me as I would think of him, whatever the world said and whoever was against him. Harriet will speak up for me when he has a doubt of my honesty, and he will believe her. Don't let my past life stand between you all and your better thoughts of me. Good-by."

Mattie was gone; she had closed the door behind her, and shut in Mr. Hinchford, who forgot his breakfast for a while in the sudden news that had been communicated. He was forgetful at times now; his memory, though he did not care to own it, would betray him when he least expected it. In the midst of his reverie a flash of a new recollection took away his breath, and brought his hand again to his inflexible stock.

"Good Heaven!—not that letter, I hope."

He hustled into the back room, and searched nervously in the pockets of coats, waistcoats, and trowsers about there. A blank expression settled on his countenance as he drew from the side-pocket of the great-coat he had worn yesterday, another letter—the letter which Mattie had demanded, and he thought that he had given her.

"God bless me! she's torn up the letter that was given me to post last night!"

He made a dash down stairs, but Mattie had gone, and the double mistake could not be rectified.

Mattie had made her final leave-taking by that time. She had gone straight from Mr. Hinchford's apartments into the shop, taking up her position on the street-side of the counter facing Mr. Wesden.

"I'm—I'm ready to go now, Sir!"

"Very well. I—I didn't mean you to go in such a hurry; but as you have looked upon it in that light, why I can't stop you. There's your salary up to the month."

He took it from the little back shelf and laid it on the counter; Mattie hesitated for a moment; her face crimsoned, and there was an impulsive movement to sweep the money to the floor, checked by a second and better thought.

"Thank you, Sir."

The money was dropped into her pocket; she looking steadily at Mr. Wesden meanwhile.

"I shall send for my box when I've found a home," she said. "Let the man take it without being watched; some of you might like to know what has become of me, and I don't wish that yet a while."

"Where do you think of going?"

"Any where I can be trusted," was the unintentional retort. "I am not particular, and I have a hope that God will send a friend to me. I think of going from here to Cambridge well to bid one friend good-by, at least—what do you think, Sir?"

"You had better not. She's ill."

"You never said that before!" cried Mattie; "ill and alone!"

"Harriet will return home when she gets up—she is just ill enough to be kept very quiet."

"I'll not go to her then."

Mattie still fixed her dark eyes on Mr. Wesden; that steady unflinching gaze was making the stationer feel uncomfortable.

"I don't know that there is any thing else to say," said Mattie, after a long pause; "and I suppose you've nothing else to say to me?"

"Nothing. Except," he added, after another pause on his part, "that I hope you will take care of yourself—that this will be a lesson to you."

Mattie colored once more, and took time to reply.

"I would part friends with you," she said at last. "I have been trying hard to bear every thing that you say, remembering past kindness. You saved me at the eleventh hour, when I was going back to ruin—you taught me what was good, and made this place my home; for you and yours I would do any thing in the world that lay in my power. But!" she cried, her face kindling and her eyes flashing, "if it had been any one else who had spoken to me as you have done, who had cast such cruel slander at me, and believed in nothing but my villainess, I—I think I should have killed him!"

Mr. Wesden had never seen Mattie in a passion before; her frenzy alarmed him, and he backed against the drawers behind him lest she should attempt some mischief. His confidence in the righteousness of his cause was more shaken also; but he did not know how to express it, having been ever a man whose ideas came slowly.

"Up stairs, a little while ago, Mr. Wesden,"

continued Mattie, "I thought that we were quits with each other—that casting me back to the streets made amends for the rescue from them years ago. I thought almost that I could afford to hate you; but you must forgive me that—I was not myself then. I know better now; and if I go back alone and friendless, still I take with me all the good thoughts which the latter years have given me, and no misfortune is likely to rob me of."

"But—but—"

"But this is strange talk in a woman who can not account for missing property, and keeps out all night," said Mattie; "you can't think any better of me now: some day you will. Good-by, Sir—may I shake hands with you?"

"I—I don't bear any malice, Mattie. I—I wish you well, girl," he stammered, as he held forth his hand.

Mattie's declamation had cowed him, softened him. He was the man of the past, who had faith in her, and whom late events had not changed so much. He thought it might be a mistake just then—he did not know—he understood nothing—his brain was in a whirl.

Mattie shook hands with him, and then went away without another word. Outside in the streets the traffic was thickening—it was Saturday morning, when people sought the streets in greater numbers. Mattie's slight form was soon lost in the surging stream of human life; Mr. Wesden, who had followed her to the door, noticed how soon she was submerged.

Five years ago he had taken her from the streets—a stray. Again in her womanhood, at his wish, he had cast her back to them a stray still—nothing more!

A stray whom no one would claim as child, sister, friend; who went away characterless in a world ever ready to believe the worst. She had spoken of her strength to do battle now alone, but she did not know with what enemies she had to fight, or what deadly weapons to encounter; watching her from that shop door she looked little more than the child God had once prompted him to save.

He could have run after her again, as in the old times, and cried "Stop!" He could have taken her to his heart again, and began anew with her, sinking the incomprehensible by-gones forever.

But he moved not; and Mattie, the stray, drifted from his home, and went away to seek her fortunes.

BOOK IV.

"WANT PLACES"

CHAPTER I.

"ONE-AND-TWENTY."

MATTIE's box was fetched away from Great Suffolk Street. The man who called for it brought a note to Ann Packet, which she found a friend to read for her later in the day. It did not furnish Ann Packet with her address. "When I am settled, Ann," she promised, quoting her own words on that morning of departure, "and I am very unsettled yet a while."

Poor Ann Packet, who had looked forward to paying sundry flying visits to Mattie, and upon spending her holiday once a month with her, mourned over this evasion of Mattie's. "Won't she trust even in me, or think of me a bit?" she said.

In Mattie's letter was inclosed a smaller one to Harriet Weeden, who understood the *coup d'état* which had ensued by that time, and was agitated and unhappy concerning it. This was Mattie's letter to Harriet Weeden, *in extenso*:

"Keep your promise, dearest Harriet; never forget that your happiness and that of others depend upon it. Do not think that I have taken the blame or am a victim; it is not only for my actions of that night that I have gone away. Sooner or later it must have come. God bless you! I hope to see you again soon. Your letter to Sidney is destroyed."

Harriet pondered over this missive. For weeks she became more thoughtful, and aroused fresh anxiety in her father; for weeks went on an unknown and fierce struggle to break away from her promise and tell all.

She had been afraid of the revelation, and what would be said and thought about it; she had seen her innocence construed as half-consent, and herself set down as an accomplice in Mr. Darcy's plot; she had feared losing the esteem and confidence of all who now respected her. But when Mattie had been sent away for keeping out all night—and though she had not heard the story she guessed of whom Mattie had been in search—her sense of justice, her love for Mattie, led her more than once to the verge of the revelation. Keeping her own secret was one thing, but the blame to rest on another was very different; and despite her promise—into which she had been entrapped, as it were—the avowal was ever trembling on her lips.

After all it was but the truth to confess. Her father and mother would believe her; and if Sidney Hinchford turned away, why surely there was nothing to grieve at in that; she could not have loved Sidney, or that letter would never have been written to him. And yet let it be recorded here, Harriet Weeden's main incentive to keep her secret close was for Sidney Hinchford's sake. It tortured her to think that she should have ever entertained one feeling of love or liking for the Mr. Darcy who had sought her

humiliation; the shock to her pride had not only turned her utterly away from Mr. Darcy, but the very contrast presented to young Hinchford had aroused the old, or given birth to a new affection for the latter.

She valued Sidney Hinchford at his just due at last; she understood his patience, energy, and love; how he had been working for her from his boyhood, and what would have been the effect to him of losing her. She had made up her mind, when he returned, to give him all her heart, and sustain him by her love against those secret cares which lately had been shadowing him. She believed that her secret was forever shut away from the light—that keeping it under lock and key would be better for Sidney, whose trust in her was so implicit. He had always believed in her devotion to himself; why should she break in upon that dream, now she felt that all girlish follies were over with her, and she had become a staid woman, whose hope was to be his wife?

She was consoled by Mattie's letter: "It is not only for my actions of that night that I have gone away. Sooner or later it must have come."

Mattie, ever a deep thinker, considered it best also: by her confession even Mattie would be unhappy; so Harriet kept her secret for every body's sake, and made her last mistake in life. Mattie and she had both regarded the subject from a narrow point of view, and were wrong. The best-intentioned people are wrong sometimes, and from young women with their heads disturbed concerning young men we do not anticipate the judgment of Solomon.

Harriet Weeden felt secure, knowing not of the letter in Mr. Hinchford's coat, of Mr. Hinchford's mistake and Mattie's. And yet the chances now were against the revelation, thanks to the treacherous memory of the old gentleman. He had mentioned his error in the counting-house to his employers the same day, and met with a reprimand and a supercilious shrug of the shoulders. "It was like old Hinchford," one partner had muttered to another, and there the subject ended for a while. Mr. Hinchford went home, resolving to restore the letter to Harriet Weeden, took the letter from his pocket and put it on the bedroom mantle-piece to keep the matter in his remembrance until he saw Harriet again.

There for two days the letter remained, till Ann Packet, in dusting the room, knocked it on the floor, picked it up, and placed it on the dressing-glass, where Mr. Hinchford found it, and rather absently shut it in the looking-glass drawer as a safe place; and then the letter passed completely out of recollection, there being a great deal to trouble his mind just then.

For they were not kind to him at his business, expected too much from him, and made no allowance for an old servant; and above all, and before all, the boy's birthday was drawing near—it was three days before Harriet Weeden's—

and there was no sign of Sidney Hinchford on his way toward him.

By that time Mr. Wesden had found a customer for his business, which was to change hands early in February; and in February what would become of him, and whither should he go himself? thought Mr. Hinchford. Good gracious! he would have to change his residence, and his son perhaps never be able to find him! A horrid thought, which only lasted till he thought of his son's business address, but while it lasted a trying one.

When the birthday of Sidney Hinchford came round in January the father grew excited; talked of his son at business all day, and worried the clerks about his son's accomplishments; returned in the evening to harass Mr. Wesden, always at his post behind the counter, for the few more days remaining of his business life.

"I have brought a bottle of wine home with me in the hope of the lad's return," said Mr. Hinchford, placing that luxury on the counter; "his one-and-twentieth year must not pass without our wishing *bon voyage* to his manhood. You and I, Mr. Wesden, will at least drink his health to-night."

"Very well."

"I'll come and keep you company after tea in the back parlor, Wesden, and we'll have a long talk about my boy and your girl. There should have been a formal betrothal to-night, with much rejoicing afterward. To think of his being one-and-twenty to-day, and away from us!"

"It must seem odd to you. Perhaps he'll come back to-night."

"That's what I have been thinking, Wesden. I fancy if he were near his return journey he would make a push for it to-night, knowing the old father's wishes. I fancy, do you know, that if I had been your daughter—"

"Well—what of her?"

"If I had been Harriet I should have remembered this day, and looked in for a few moments."

"Her mother don't grow stronger; she is fidgety when she is away, and the servant we have is not of much use."

"Then Harriet might have written, wishing him many happy returns of the day, or have come to congratulate me upon having such a son grown to man's estate."

Having expressed this opinion Mr. Hinchford went up stairs to the tea which Ann Packet had prepared for him; spent an hour after tea in putting the room to rights, opening Sidney's desk, and lighting the table-lamp at the side thereof.

"Now, if he come home, and there's work to be done—and if it's to be done, his one-and-twentieth birthday will not stop it—there's every thing ready to begin!"

He went down stairs to join Mr. Wesden in the parlor—the news-boy was perched on the chair in the shop, keeping guard over the goods that night—and found Harriet Wesden seated at the fireside.

"Why, it's all coming true," cried the old gentleman, seizing both hands of Harriet, and shaking them up and down, "and he's coming home!"

"Have you thought so, too?" asked Harriet.

"Well, I have hoped so, at all events; and it

seems as if we were waiting for him now, and he *must* come. But don't talk too much about that, please," he said, with his characteristic tug at his stock, "or I shall feel as if something had happened when he keeps away. But we'll drink the boy's health, at all events, God bless him! and we'll have a game at whist, three and a dummy, and make quite a party of it in our little way. Sid one-and-twenty, Wesden! By all that's glorious, it's a fine thing to have a son come to maturity!"

Wine-glasses were produced—even a pack of cards, a bran-new pack from the stock—and Sid's health was drunk very quietly, without any musical honors, but very heartily for all that.

And five minutes after the health had been drunk, Sidney Hinchford, portmanteau in hand, entered the shop, and walked straight into the parlor.

"I said he'd come!" exclaimed the father. "Many happy returns of the day, you runaway! God bless you, my boy, and grant you health and happiness!"

He wound up his wishes by kissing him as though he had been a girl. Sidney blushed, and laughed at his father's impulsiveness, and then turned to his two remaining friends with whom he shook hands—we need not add with whom the longer time.

"Finish your game, at whist," he said; "I must not spoil the harmony of the evening. Here, shall I take dummy?"

"If you like. But we want to know—"

"Presently you shall know all; let us relapse into our old positions, just as if I had never been away, for a while. How's Mattie—where is she?"

All three looked somewhat blankly at him. Mattie's departure and the reasons which had actuated it were more or less a mystery, and difficult of explanation.

Mr. Wesden acted as spokesman.

"I'm sorry to say she has gone away under very disagreeable circumstances."

"Gone away!—Mattie!"

"Your father can tell you all about it some other time," said Mr. Wesden. "I don't think we need spoil the evening by a long, sad story."

"Yes, but, dash it! disagreeable circumstances," said Sidney—"that's an awkward phrase, and don't sound affectionate. But until to-morrow we'll postpone all details. I'll take dummy, and be your partner, Harriet."

"Very well."

He did not know whether it were better to be Harriet's partner, or to be her father's, and sit by Harriet's side; that matter had always perplexed him the few times he had played at whist with them. It seemed somewhat strange his playing at whist at all that night—his arriving from a long journey, tired and travel-worn, as evident from his looks, and immediately sitting down to cards, as though there were an infatuation in the game, which under no circumstances it was in his power to resist. Harriet Wesden thought it strange at least, and now and then furtively regarded him. He played whist well, as he did every thing well he undertook; but his heart was not in the game, and more than once, as he held the cards close to his glasses in the old near-sighted fashion, Harriet fancied that the face assumed a troubled expres-

sion. The game at whist was over at last, and with it Sidney Hinchford's power of endurance.

"Now that is over, I think I'll tell you a story. I don't know three people in the world so well entitled to have the first hearing of it. I'll ask you, Sir," turning to his father, "to give me courage, and see that I do not give way!"

Mr. Hinchford, senior, stared, as well he might, at this; it placed him in a new position, and braced his nerves accordingly. Sidney had resolved upon these tactics on his homeward route; there was no chance of breaking his news gradually—the world would be talking of it ere the morning.

"I always hated dodging a truth," said Sidney, sturdily; "it's a bad habit, and don't answer. It's sneaking—isn't it, Mr. Wesden?"

"Well—yes."

"If there's good luck coming, go to meet it; if there's disappointment which you can't avoid, let it meet you, and not find you hiding away from the inevitable. Why, that's like a baby!"

"To be sure it is," said the father; "wait a moment—I'm not a bit nervous about this; I'll see that you keep firm, my boy, but I'll just unfasten this buckle behind my neck a moment. Now, then!"

"When I was one-and-twenty there seemed reason to believe in a partnership in my masters' firm; my masters took a fancy to me when I was a lad, and very much obliged to them I was for it. By that hope in prospective," suddenly turning to Harriet Wesden, and leaning over the table toward her, with a very anxious look upon his face, "I was led, Harriet, to think too much of you—to enter into a half-engagement, or a whole one, or a something that kept me ever thinking of you, hoping for you. When I was one-and-twenty I was to come to your father, and say, 'I am in a good position of life—may I consider Harriet as my future wife?' He was to refer me to you if satisfied with my prospects, and you were—well, I did hope very much that you were then to say 'Yes' in real earnest. All this, a pretty story, foolish for me to believe in, but a story ended now in an ugly fashion. Mr. Wesden," veering suddenly round to the stationer, "my prospects in life are infamously bad; my employers are bankrupts, and my services will not be required after this day month!"

Mr. Hinchford flung himself back in his chair with a crash that brought the top rail off; Sidney turned at once to him, and laid his hand upon his arm.

"With my father to give me courage I can bear this!"

"That's—that's—that's well, my lad. Keep strong—oh! Lord have mercy upon us!—keep strong, my boy!"

"I have been fighting hard to get the firm straight—I have been abroad to the foreign branch, working night and day there, my last chance and my employers'. I had a hope once of success till the markets fell suddenly and swamped every thing; our weakness could not stand against any thing new and unforeseen, and so we—*smashed!* It will be all over town to-morrow; but it was a good fight while it lasted."

"It's very-*unfortunate* news," said Mr. Wesden.

"I'm not afraid for myself," said Sidney,

proudly; "I think that with time and health—ah! I must not forget that—I shall work my way somewhere, and to something in good time. But I sha'n't climb to greatness all of a sudden; and it may happen that at forty—even fifty years of age—I may be no better off than I am now. That I'm disappointed is natural enough, for I know money's value, and perhaps it was a little too near my heart, and this is my lesson; but the disappointment of losing you, Harriet—of giving up that chance, as any honorable man should, is the one loss which staggers me, and will be the hardest to surmount. I thought that I would make a clean breast of it and begin my one-and-twentieth year free, as land-agents say, of all encumbrances."

It was a poor attempt at *facétie*—a very weak effort to carry things off with a high hand like a Hinchford. But he played his part well; he did not break down; he confessed his inability to keep a wife, or think of a wife, and he spoke out like one who had reached man's estate, and felt strong to bear man's troubles.

Mr. Wesden stared at Sidney long after he had concluded, and a pause had followed the outburst; Harriet Wesden, with a heightened color, looked down at her white hands so tightly clasped together in her lap, and thought that it was a strange explanation—a strange hour for an explanation which he might have chosen his time to give to her alone. Surely she might have been offered an opportunity of giving an answer also, and spared that embarrassment with which his thoughtlessness had afflicted her. Could her father answer for *her* as well as for himself!

Mr. Wesden delivered his reply after several moments' grave deliberation.

"Mr. Sidney," said he, "I always did hate any thing kept back, and doubted the honesty of any body keeping it. The truth, however hard it may be to tell, will always bear the light upon it, I'm inclined to think."

Harriet winced.

"And you've spoken fair," he continued, "and given her up like a man. Now let her answer for herself; if she don't mind waiting till you're able to keep her—till you're forty or fifty, as you say," he added, dryly, "why, I sha'n't stand in opposition. The longer the engagement the longer she'll be my daughter. There, can I put it in a fairer light than that?"

Sidney's harangue, or Sidney's father's portwine, had rendered Mr. Wesden magnanimous as well as loquacious that evening; or else, in business, his better nature was developing anew.

Now to such an answer as this one can imagine Sidney Hinchford starting to his feet and wringing Mr. Wesden's hand, or turning suddenly to Harriet and looking earnestly, almost beseechingly, in her direction. On the contrary, he remained silent and moody; Mr. Wesden's answer was unprepared for, and his compliment to his straightforwardness brought a color to Sidney's cheek; for, after all, he *was* keeping something back!

There was a painful silence, broken at last by a low and faltering voice, the musical murmur of which drew Sidney's eyes toward her at last.

"Has Mr. Sidney the patience to wait for me, or care for a long engagement; of which he may eventually tire?"

"Patience!—care for an engagement!" he almost shouted.

"Then when he asks me again," said Harriet, "I will give him my answer. But," with an arch smile toward him, "I will wait till I am asked."

"Bless you, my dear girl!" exclaimed old Hinchford, "I feel like a father toward you already; as for waiting, every true boy and girl will wait for each other—why shouldn't they, if they love one another, eh, Sid?"

His hand came heavily on Sid's shoulder, and knocked off his son's glasses.

"Ah! why shouldn't they, if they are sure of love lasting all the long time between engagement and marriage. Harriet! dear Harriet!" he exclaimed, "I will ask you presently."

"When the old fogies are out of the way, and the courtship can be carried on in the recondite style," cried his elated father; "a sly dog this, who will not be embarrassed by witnesses—eh, Wesden?"

Wesden gave a short laugh, a double-knock species of laugh, in which he indulged when more than usually hilarious.

"Ah! that's it!" he said; "and as for waiting, why Mrs. Wesden and I are an old couple, and mayn't keep you waiting so long as you fancy, Sidney. It isn't much money, but—"

"That will do, Sir," said Sidney, hastily; "I must support my wife, not let my wife support me. Harriet," turning to the daughter, with an impetuosity almost akin to fierceness, "is it not time to return to Camberwell?"

"Oh ho! do you hear that, Wesden?" cried the father.

Mr. Hinchford had forgotten the downfall of his son's air-built castle in the happiness which he believed would make amends for it to Sidney. And if Sidney were content, why, he was.

Harriet was glad of an excuse to escape. Two old gentlemen talking of love affairs—her love affairs—before the suitor, was scarcely fair, and her position was not enviable. And besides that, Sidney Hinchford's manner had not been comprehensible, and required explanation; she could almost believe that he did not desire an engagement; there was so little of the impassioned lover in his new demeanor. There was a mystery, and she would be glad to have it dissipated.

Harriet went away, escorted by her lover, and the two fathers drew their chairs closer to the fire and drank the health of the happy couple as they went out at the door.

"This is a proud day for you and me—to have such children, and to see them growing up fonder and fonder of each other every day—eh, Wesden?"

"Yes. I have been uneasy about Harriet, and leaving her alone in the world. She will be always happy with him, and have a good protector."

"That she will. How the little girl would have clapped her hands at this!"

"What little girl?" asked Wesden.

"Why, Mattie, to be sure. Mattie, who used to play the mother almost to those two, her seniors, and be always as interested as a mother in making a match between them."

"Ah—Mattie—yes."

Mr. Wesden looked about for his pipe and his pipe-lights on the mantle-piece.

Mr. Hinchford drew his favorite meerschaum from his coat-pocket. The two old men faced each other, and began to smoke vigorously.

"I wonder where that girl has got to?" suggested Hinchford.

"It's impossible to say. In good hands, I hope."

"I'd lay a heavy wager that she knows whose birthday it is to-day," commented Mr. Hinchford; "she was a girl who never forgot any thing."

"Ah—perhaps so!"

"And I think she might have cleared up the fog, if you had waited a bit, Wesden."

"Why didn't she, if she could?"

"I don't know. I promised to believe in her, and somehow I do."

"Can any thing in the world account for a girl her age being out all night?" said Wesden.

"Ah! that looks bad; I can't get over that;" said Mr. Hinchford, giving his head one sorrowful shake.

Poor Mattie—poor stray! whose actions, the best and most unselfish, were not to be accounted for, or done justice to in this world.

CHAPTER II.

SIDNEY'S CONFESSION.

SIDNEY HINCHFORD escorted Harriet Wesden home to Camberwell. A most unromantic walk down the Newington Causeway—sacred to milliners and counter-skippers—the Walworth Road, Camberwell Road, and streets branching thence to melancholy suburbs; and yet a walk that was the happiest in the lives of these two, though looked back upon in after-years through tear-dimmed eyes, and sighed for by hearts that had been sorely wrung. Such a walk as most of us may have taken once in life—seldom more than once; a walk away from sober realism into fairyland, where every thing apart from love was a something to be utterly despised, and where love first rose to fill our souls with promise. What if the story ended abruptly, and the waking came, and one or two of us fell heavily to earth; we did not die of the wounds, and we see now that the fall was the best thing that could have happened for us. We look back at the past, and regret not the sunshine that dazzled us there.

And yet there was a stern story to relate, and Sidney had escorted Harriet Wesden home, believing in the darkness rather than the light upon his way. He went forth regarding life literally, and he found himself, after a while, in the land of romance, wherein sober existence had no dwelling-place.

Let him tell the story in his own way.

Harriet and Sidney had not proceeded a long distance together before he began.

"I think that I must have puzzled you very much, Harriet, by this evening's behavior—by the way in which I received your kindness—more than kindness. There was a reason, and I am going to explain it."

"Is it worth explanation?" asked Harriet.

"I think so—you shall judge. It is an explanation that I can not give my father, for it would break his heart, I think, with the long suspense which would follow it."

"So serious an explanation as that, Sidney?"

"Yes. Is it not odd that, with my character for straightforwardness, I should have been all my life keeping back the truth?"

"From him, for his sake only, Sidney?"

"Perhaps for my own: to save myself from a host of inquisitive questions, and an attention that would irritate rather than soothe. I am a very selfish man."

"I don't believe that yet a while."

"When I came home to-night I had no other hope than that you and your father would consider that I had not made good my claim to become a favored suitor, and that there was nothing left me but to make my statement and withdraw my rash pretensions. You will pardon me, Harriet, but it had never struck me that you were strong enough, or—pardon me again—that you had ever loved me well enough to attempt a *sacrifice*."

"I was a girl, very vain and frivolous; you were right."

"I come back and find you altered very much, Harriet. I find the old reserve that piqued my pride no longer there, and, instead, a something newer and more frank, a something that says, 'Trust me.' Is that a true reading?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"I am vain enough to believe in the heart growing fonder during my absence, though I have always fancied the experiment full of danger for the absent one. Say that the heart has done so, or that I did not understand you. Still the effect was the same, or I should not have the courage to tell you the great secret of my life. If I believed that you did not love me, or that you had ever loved any one else, I would not venture to put you to this test."

Harriet hung down her head, and her heart beat rapidly; the old story was before her, and his very words seemed now to forbid its revelation. His firm, self-reliant nature had never swerved from her, and he judged others by himself. His was a love that had begun from boyhood, and grown with his growth; should she raise the first suspicion against her by telling him all, when it was in her power—and only in her power—to make him happy, to make amends for all by her new love for him? Let him test her how he liked now, she was a woman who looked at life seriously, and the follies of her youth were over!

They walked on silently for a while; they went on together, playing their love-dream out, and oblivious of the matter-of-fact world hustling them in their progress.

"This is the love test—and it must be a strange, pure love to exist after I have told all," he said.

"Do you doubt me, Sidney, already?"

"I can not tell. I can not," he added, more passionately, "believe in any affection strong and deep enough to last; but I can forgive, and consider natural, any love that turns to pity at the truth. Do you comprehend me?"

"Scarcely."

"Well then—I am going blind!"

An awful and unexpected revelation, which took her breath away, and seemed for an instant to stop her heart beating.

"Oh! Sidney—my poor Sidney—it can not be!"

"Sooner or later, Harriet, it must be; mine is a hopeless case," he answered; "with care, and less night work, and quiet—that last means absence from all mental excitement—I may go on for a few years more; the last physician whom I have consulted even thinks he can give me ten years' grace. Now in ten years, ten of the best years of a young man's life, I ought to save, and I hope to save, sufficient to live upon. I may be over-sanguine, but if I get a good foothold I will try. And now where lives the girl who will accept a ten years' engagement, with the chance of a beggar or a blind man at the end of it?"

Harriet pressed his arm.

"Here," she answered.

"You will! There is the faith to wait, the courage to endure, and the love to sustain me. You are not afraid?"

"No—I have no fear," replied Harriet, warmly; "God knows that I have changed very much, and only lately learned to understand myself. I do not fear, Sidney, for I—I have learned to love you, and, by comparison, to see how noble and high-principled you are. But oh! if I were but more worthy of you, and your deep love for me!"

"Worthy!" he echoed; "why, what have I done to deserve a life's devotion to me, save to love you, which was the most natural thing in the world. What have I ever done to deserve the happiness of winning your love—a long-legged, near-sighted gawky like me!—and such a love as shrinks not from the dark prospect ahead, but will disperse it by its brightness, and keep me from despairing. Why, in ten years' time we shall not be an old couple—I shall only be one-and-thirty, and you but nine-and-twenty. When the light goes out," he added, solemnly, "you will place your hand in mine to make amends for it, and begin my new happiness by the wife's companionship; shall I be so very much to be pitied then, I wonder?"

"I hope not, Sid."

She had not called him by that name since he was a boy, and his heart thrilled at it, and took fresh hope from it.

"All this on my part I know is very selfish," he said. "I have told you already that I am a selfish man, to wish that your youth and beauty and love should be sacrificed to my affliction. I did not think of gaining them; I was content to pass away from you, and see you allied to one more deserving, more fitting, than myself; even now I will go away resigned, thinking you are right to give me up, if but one doubt linger at your heart."

"Not one," was the firm answer.

"I can bear all now—afterward, a doubt would strike me down—remember that."

"Trust in me, Sid—ever."

"I will."

The hand that had rested on his arm was held in his now, and they walked on together, with their hearts as full of happiness as though blindness were a trifling calamity, scarcely worth considering under the circumstances.

Sidney had pictured so dark a prospect ahead that this sudden change made all bright, and Harriet Weeden was happy in being able to prove that her love was unselfish and strong. She did not believe that she had ever loved any one else then—she knew that hers was a different and more intense affection, something that felt like

love, and that nothing in the world could destroy. Mr. Darcy was but a phantom, far back in the mists; his own dark efforts had utterly extinguished every ray of romance, in the false light of which he had luridly shone. Strengthened by her new love, she could have broken her promise to Mattie, and told all then, trusting in him to see the truth, and believe in her henceforth; but he had spoken of the danger of excitement to him, and once again—once for all—went the story back, never to hover on the brink of discovery again!

It was a strange courtship—that of Sidney Hinchford and Harriet's—but they were happy. The calamity was in the distance, and their hearts were young and strong. Both had faith then; and of the chances and changes of life it was not natural to dwell upon after the one avowal had been uttered.

"Then it is an engagement?" he had asked, hoarsely, and she had answered, "Yes," with his own frankness and boldness; and thus the path ahead seemed bright enough.

Outside the suburban retreat of the Wesdens' Sidney Hinchford had a little struggle with duty and inclination—conquering inclination with that strong will of his.

"I'll go back to the old gentleman," he said at last; "he is scarcely used to my reappearance yet, and a little makes him nervous. Good-by, love."

A lover's parting at the iron gate, to the intense edification of the pot-man coming up the street with the nine o'clock beer; and then Sidney tore himself homeward, thinking what a happy fellow he was, and how the business disappointments of life had been softened by the events that had followed them. The future could not be dark with Harriet; before this he had become resigned to his calamity, bent his strong mind to regard it as inevitable; now there was to come happiness with it, and he would be more than content, he thought.

He was soon back in Suffolk Street. Mr. Wesden was in the shop talking to a short, thin man with a sallow complexion, a hooked nose, bright black eyes, and straight hair; a man dressed in black, with a rusty satin stock of the same color, secured by an old-fashioned brooch of gold wire, in the shape of a heart.

"And her name was Mattie, you say?"

"That was the name she called herself, and went always by in this house."

"And you don't know her whereabouts?"

"I haven't an idea."

"But you think she has gone wrong, don't you?" the man asked with no small eagerness.

"Well, I hope not; but I think so."

"Who? Mattie!" cried Sidney, suddenly thrusting himself into the conversation; "our Mattie—that be—*hanged!*"

He checked himself in time to save scandalizing the ears of the gentleman in black, who twirled round with a tee-to-tum velocity and faced him.

"What do you know of her, young man?" he asked, abruptly.

"What do you want to know for?" was the rejoinder.

"I wish to find her—I am very anxious to find her."

"I hope you may, if it's for her good."

"Her moral and spiritual good, Sir—without a doubt."

"You can't improve her. There isn't a better or more unselfish girl in the world!"

"*What!*" screamed the man in black.

"Not a better girl, I verily believe. I haven't heard the reasons for her departure yet," he said, looking at Mr. Wesden; "but they're good ones, or I was never more mistaken in my life."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Wesden; "I've tried to think the best of Mattie, but I can't. There are no honest reasons for her conduct, or she would have told me."

Sidney Hinchford paused.

"It must be very unreasonable conduct, then," said Sidney; "and she must have changed very much during my absence from this house. But, upon my soul!" he exclaimed, vehemently, "I sha'n't believe any harm in her, for one!"

The stranger regarded Sidney Hinchford attentively, then said:

"You need not have brought your soul into question, Sir. Pledge that in God's service—nothing else."

"Oh!" said Sidney, taken aback at the reproof.

"You speak warmly; and somehow I've a hope of her not being very bad—of reclaiming her by my own earnest efforts. Young man, I will thank you."

He stretched forth an ungloved hand, which Sidney took—a hard hand, that gripped Sid forcibly and made him wince a little.

"You all seem in doubt, more or less," he said; "and that gives me hope. Mr. Wesden and you don't agree in opinion, and that's something. Who's that white-haired man I see in the parlor?"

"That's my father, Sir," said Sidney, smiling at the sudden curiosity evinced.

"Does he know any thing about her?"

"Not so much as myself," said Mr. Wesden.

"Have you asked the servant—if you keep one?"

"I have asked her every thing, and she knows nothing," replied the stationer.

"Then I'll go. I think I shall find her yet, mind you," he said, in an excited manner.

"I'm not a man to give up in a hurry when I've taken an idea in my head. I've been sixteen years looking for that girl?"

"Are you a relation?" asked Sidney.

"Her father."

"Indeed!"

The stranger began hammering the counter with his hard hand till the money in the till underneath rattled again. He began to take small leaps in the air, also, during the progress of his harangue.

"Her father—a poor man reclaimed from error, and knowing what it is to walk uprightly. A man who has, he trusts, done some good in his day—a man who now sets himself the task of finding that daughter he neglected once. And I'll find her and reclaim her—God will show me the way, I think. And you shall see her again, a shining light in the midst of ye—a brand from the burning, a credit to me! There's hope for her yet. Good-night!"

And very abruptly the gentleman in black leaped out of the shop and disappeared.

"That's an odd fish," remarked Sidney.

CHAPTER III.

A FLYING VISIT TO NUMBER THIRTY-FOUR.

BEFORE Mr. Wesden had finally disposed of his business in Great Suffolk Street he met with his greatest trouble in the loss of the companion, helpmate, wife, who had struggled with him for many years from indigence to moderate competence. Mrs. Wesden's health had been failing for some time, but her loss was still as unprepared for, and the husband bent lower and walked more feebly when his better half—his better self—was taken from him in his latter days.

"You have still me, remember," said Harriet, when the undemonstrative nature gave way, and he sobbed like a child at his isolation; and he had answered, "Ah! you mustn't desert me yet a while—you must comfort me;" and refused to be comforted for many a long day. His character even altered once more—as characters alter in all cases except in novels; and though the abruptness remained, and the silent fits were of longer duration, he became less harsh in his judgments, and more easily influenced for good. This was evident one day, when, after an intense study of the fire before which he sat, he burst forth with—

"I wonder if I acted well by Mattie—poor Mattie, who would be so sorry to hear all the sad news that has happened since she left us."

Harriet, who had always taken Mattie's part to the verge of her own confession, answered, warmly,

"No, we all acted very badly—very cruelly. When she comes again—as she will, I feel assured—I hope she will forgive us, father."

"Forgive us?"

Mr. Hinchford had not arrived to that pitch of kind consideration yet, but Mattie's departure and long silence were troubles to him when he was left to think of the past, and of the business from which he had at last retired in earnest.

The shop had changed proprietors, and the Hinchfords, father and son, had removed their furniture from Mr. Wesden's first-floor to a little house Camberwell way also. A very small domicile had this careful couple decided upon for their suburban retreat—one of a row of houses that we may designate Chesterfield Terrace, and the rents of which were two-and-twenty pounds per annum.

Mr. Hinchford, we have already premised, had somewhat lofty notions, which adversity had kept in check rather than subdued. The removal to Chesterfield Terrace was a blow to him. The rooms in Great Suffolk Street had been only borne with, scarcely resigned to; but though he had lived there many years he had never considered himself as "settled down;" merely resting by the way, before he marched off to independence and the old Hinchford state. It had been a mythical dream, perhaps, until Sidney's star rose in the ascendant, and then he had quickly built his castles in the air, and bided his time more sanguinely. When that vision faded in its turn the old gentleman was sorely tried; only his son's strategy in feigning to require consolation had turned him away from his own regrets to thoughts of how to make them less light for the boy.

But 34 Chesterfield Terrace, Chesterfield Road, Camberwell New Road, was a blow to him. The

air was fresher than in Great Suffolk Street, the large market-gardens at the back of his house were pleasant in all seasons, except the cabbage season; there were three bedrooms, two parlors, a wash-house at the back, and a long strip of garden, constituting a house and premises that were solely and wholly theirs, and entitled them to the glorious privilege of electing a member for incorruptible Lambeth; but the change was not all that Mr. Hinchford had looked forward to for so many years, and he grew despondent, and fancied that it could never be better now.

The Hinchfords had taken into their service Ann Packet, of work-house origin and undiscoverable parentage; she had pleaded to be constituted their servant, at any wages, or no wages at all, rather than at her time of life to be sent forth in search of fresh faces and new homes.

At this period Mr. Wesden had required a servant also, and Ann Packet had begged Sidney Hinchford to engage her at once, before she should be asked to continue in the old service.

"What! tired of them?" Sidney had said, with some surprise.

"They gave me warning," replied Ann, somewhat sullenly, "and I accepts the same. They turned poor Mattie away without warning at all, and I never forgives 'em that, Sir."

"Ah! you are on Mattie's side, too, Ann?"

"There never was a girl that thought so little of herself, and so much of others!" cried Ann, "or who deserved less to be sent out into the streets. I gave up the Wesdens after that, Sir."

"But Miss Harriet is Mattie's champion also, and will defend her to the death, Ann."

"And will she be a Wesden all her life, Sir?" asked Ann Packet, with an archness for which she was only that once remarkable.

Ann Packet became domestic servant at 34 Chesterfield Terrace, then, and congratulated herself on the kitchen being level with the parlors, which was good for her ankles, and spared her breath considerably.

Meanwhile the shadows were stealing on toward the Hinchford dwelling-place; Sidney's month in service with his old employers had been extended to two months, after which the firm, utterly shattered by adversity, was to dissolve itself into its component atoms, and be never heard of more in the busy streets east of Temple Bar.

Sidney, it need scarcely be said, had not sat idle during the time; he had looked keenly round him for a change of clerkship. His employers had interested themselves in a way not remarkable in employers, toward securing him a foothold in other and more stable establishments, but business was slack in the City, and there were no fresh hands wanted just at present.

Sidney was not a young man to despair; he let no chance slip, and disappointment did not relax his efforts. He did not believe that the time would come and leave him wholly without "a berth." He had faith in his abilities, and he thought that they would work a way for him somewhere. And even a week or two "out of work" would not hurt him; he had saved money, and could pay his fair share toward the household expenses as well as his father, who kept his place longer than Sidney had ever believed he would.

His father was more solicitous than himself;

every evening he asked very anxiously if Sidney had heard of any thing in the City, and was not greatly exhilarated by Sid's careless "Not yet." Things were getting serious when there was only a week more to spend at the old desk, where bright hopes had been born and collapsed; Sidney was even becoming grave, although his company manners were put on before the father, to keep the old gentleman's mind at ease.

But Mr. Hinchford's mind was not likely to be at ease at that period; he was playing a part himself, and disguising his own troubles from his son, thereby causing a double game at disinterestedness between Sid and him.

Three weeks before the son's time had expired at his office, Mr. Hinchford had received a week's notice to quit. His memory had again betrayed him, confused the accounts, and put the clerks out, and it was considered necessary to inform the old gentleman that his services were not likely to be required any longer. The notice came like a thunder-bolt to Mr. Hinchford, whose belief in his own powers was still strong, and who had not had the remotest idea that long ago he had been tolerated by his employers, and set down for a troublesome, pompous, and disputatious old boy by the whipper-snappers round him. His salary had never been more than thirty-five shillings a week, and he had put up with it rather than been grateful for it, looking forward to the future rise of the Hinchfords above the paltry shillings and pence of everyday routine. He had not anticipated being turned off—pronounced worn-out in that service which a Hinchford had patronized.

The poor old fellow's pride was touched, and he took his adieu and his last week's salary with a lordly air, looking to the life the gentleman that he had been once. He expressed no regret at the summary dismissal, but marched out of the office with his white head thrown a little more back than usual, and it was only as he neared Chesterfield Terrace that his courage gave way, and he began to think of the future prospects of Sid and himself.

Sid was in trouble, and a little more bad news might be too much for him. He would try and keep his secret, until Sid had found a good berth for himself in the City. Affairs were looking desperate, and the revelation must come, but he could bear it himself, he thought—this was a bold man with no faith in the strong son, whom an avalanche might affect, little else. Mr. Hinchford took Ann Packet into his confidence, and impressed her with the necessity of keeping Sid in the dark concerning the father's absence from business.

"Don't tell him, Ann, that I keep away from office after he's left; it's easy for me to make an excuse for an early return, if he come back before his time. I wouldn't have that boy worried for the world, just now."

Ann Packet, who took time to digest matters foreign to her ordinary business, was some days in comprehending the facts of the case, and then held counsel with herself as to whether it were expedient to keep Sidney in ignorance, considering how the old gentleman "went on" during his son's absence.

"He'll fret himself to death, and I shall be hanged for not stopping it, p'raps," she thought.

Once or twice she took the liberty of intruding

into the parlor, and recommending Mr. Hinchford, senior, to try a walk, or a book, or a visit to Mr. Wesden; and, startled out of his maundering, he would make an effort to follow one of the three counsels, seldom the last, because Mr. Wesden was Harriet's father, and saw Sid very frequently.

He took many walks in search of a situation for himself, but the one refrain was, "Too old," and he began to see that he had overstepped the boundary, and was scarcely fit for a new place. He almost conceived an idea—just a foggy one, which, however, he never confessed to his dying day—that he was a little forgetful at times; for Chesterfield Terrace lay in a net-work of newly-built streets at the back of the Camberwell New Road, and he was always taking the wrong turning, and losing himself. Still it was deep thought about Sid which led him in the wrong direction; presently his mind would be more composed; Sid would be in a good place, and he need not have one secret from him.

The last day came round; Sidney's services were over for good; he had had a painful parting with his old masters, who had been more than commonly attached to him, and he came home looking a little grave, despite the best face on the matter which he had put on at the front-door.

"Any thing new in the City, Sid?" asked the father.

"No, nothing new," he replied. "What makes you home so early to-day?"

Sid had turned in before the daylight was over, and found his father walking up and down the room with his hands behind him.

"Early?" repeated the old man. "Oh! they're not particularly busy just now in the Bridge Road. Very slack, I may say."

"Ah! I suppose so," said Sid, absently.

"And there's nothing new at all then, Sid?"

"Nothing."

"You'll keep a stout heart, my boy," said the father, with a cheering voice, and yet with a lip that quivered in spite of him. "I suppose, now, you don't feel very dull?"

"Dull, with my wits about me and a hundred chances, perhaps, waiting for me in the City to-morrow!"

"Yes, you'll have all day to-morrow; I had forgotten that," said Mr. Hinchford; "to be sure, all day now!"

Sidney saw that his father was perplexed, even disturbed in mind, but he set down Mr. Hinchford's embarrassment to the same source as his own thoughts; he did not know that he had only inherited his unselfishness from his sire. Or rather, he did not remember how an unselfish heart, allied to an unthinking head, had been the cause of the downfall in old times.

On the morrow Sidney Hinchford had the day before him, but the result was bad. He had visited many of the houses heretofore in connection with the old firm, but luck was against him, and many objected to a clerk from a house that had collapsed. It had been a fair bankruptcy; one of those honorable "breaks up" which occur once or twice in a century, and are more completely break-ups from sheer honesty of purpose than cases which make a "to do" in the Court, and march off with flying colors; but Sidney represented one of a staff that had come to grief

somehow, and "there was nothing in his way just at present."

Three or four days passed like this, and matters were becoming serious to the Hinchfords—father and son seemed settling down to misfortune, although the son betrayed no anxiety, and the father's care were for the hours when the son's back was turned. In fact Sidney Hinchford was not quickly dispirited; a little did not seriously affect him, and he went on doggedly and persistently, making the round of all the great firms that had had, once upon a time, dealings with his own; abashed seldom, dispirited never, firmly and stolidly proceeding on his way, and calmly waiting for the chance that would come in due time.

Meanwhile the father went down to zero immediately the door closed behind Sidney. He felt that he was not acting fairly by keeping the secret of his discharge from Sid; but he was waiting for good news, that might counterbalance the bad which he had to communicate. He knew that in a day or two, at the utmost, all must come out, but he put off the evil day to the last—a characteristic weakness—weakness or good policy, which was it?—that he had adopted ever since there had been evil days to fret about.

In the gray afternoon of an April day he sat alone in his front-parlor, more utterly dispirited than he had been since his wife's death, years ago. No good fortune had come either to father or son, and he was inclined to regard things in the future lugubriously; work-houses and parish funerals not being the least of his fancy sketches. He had taken his head between his hands, and was brooding very deeply before the scanty little fire-place, which he intended to heap up with coal a few minutes before Sidney's expected return, when Ann Packet came into the room, very confused, and speaking in a hoarse voice.

"If you please, Sir, here's a visitor!"

"I can't see any visitors, Ann," he answered, sharply, "unless—unless it's any one from—"

"It's only Mattie, Sir; she's come to see you for a moment."

"Mattie! bless my soul, has she turned up again?"

"She turned up at the front-door only a minute ago. Lord bless her! You might have knocked me down with a straw, Sir!"

"I'll see her; show her in."

Mattie came in the instant afterward. The hall of the Hinchfords was not so spacious but that any thing spoken in the front-room would reach the ears of one waiting in the passage. She heard the answer and entered at once.

"Well, Mattie, how are you?"

"Pretty well, I thank you, Sir," was returned, in the old brisk accents.

Mattie was not looking pretty well; on the contrary, very pale and thin, as though anxiety, or hard work, or both, had been her portion since she had left Great Suffolk Street. She was dressed in black, very neatly dressed, and possibly the dark trappings had some effect in increasing the pallor of her countenance.

"We thought that we had lost you for good, Mattie."

"Was it likely, Sir, that I was going to lose sight of all those who had been kind to me?"

"You're not looking very well," he said.

"Ah! we mustn't judge by people's looks," said Mattie, cheerfully. "I'm well enough, thank God! And you, Sir?"

"Well, Mattie, thank God, too!"

"And Sidney, Sir?"

"As brave as ever. I wish he had been at home; he has been anxious to see you, Mattie."

"He is very kind," she said, in a low voice; adding, "and what does he think?"

Mr. Hinchford was not quick in catching a subject upon which Mattie had brooded now for some months.

"Think of what?"

"Of me! Mr. Wesden has—hasn't turned him against me, Sir?"

"Oh no! He sticks up for you like a champion."

"I thought he would. He never spoke ill of any one in his life, and he always took the part of those who were unfortunate. I was sure he would not side against me."

"Sit down, Mattie, sit down."

"Thank you, no, Sir. I shall never sit down in the house of any one who has heard ill news of me until I can clear myself or time clears me. I shall never go near Mr. Wesden's, although I feel for all the sorrow there."

"You know what has happened, then?"

"I have put on black, as for a lost mother. I was at the funeral, but they did not see me. Oh! Sir, I know all about you. What should I do alone in the world if I didn't think of those who saved me when I was young?"

"And what are you doing?"

"Getting my living by needle-work, by artificial flower-making, or by any thing that's honest which falls in my way. I keep at work, and hunt about for work, and there are some good people, I find, who take pity upon those situated like myself. I'm not afraid, Sir, of doing well."

"Glad to hear it, Mattie."

Mattie motioned Ann Packet to retire. Ann, who had been standing in the doorway all this time, open-mouthed and open-eared, withdrew at the hint. Mattie advanced and laid her hand upon Mr. Hinchford's arm.

"He goes there very often—they are engaged!"

Mr. Hinchford, who had always one thought upon his mind, understood this at once—there was no necessity for any nominative cases—"Boy Sid" always understood!

"Yes."

"But he don't go to business now—the business is over."

"Who told you?"

"I read it in the paper a lodger lends me sometimes. Mr. Sidney's out of work!"

"At present—for a day or two."

"He has heard of something that will better him?"

"He will—in a day or two."

"And you—you're out of work too, Sir?"

"That confounded Ann has told you—"

"Not a word, Sir—but I have had a habit of looking for you, when you passed the house where I lodged, twice a day—and I couldn't settle down, or feel comfortable, until you had passed. And when you did not come, I knew what had happened."

"Still full of curiosity, Mattie," said Mr.

Hinchford, feeling the tears in his eyes at this evidence of Mattie's interest in him.

"Curious about all of you," she said, with a comprehensive gesture; "I don't feel so far away when I know what has happened, or is happening. And wanting to know the worst, or the best of every thing, I come like an inquisitive little body, as I have always been, to take you by surprise like this!"

"But—but, my good girl, I can't tell you that we're very lucky just now. But Sid must not hear that I am getting very uncomfortable, and becoming less able to bear up as I ought to do, just to keep him strong, do you see? And if all goes on like this much longer, both out of work, what will become of us? Oh! dear, dear, dear!—what a miserable old man I've been to him and myself, and every body! Oh to be comfortably out of the world, and a burden to no one!"

"Sir," said Mattie, earnestly, "a blessing to some. Don't you remember when you were stronger being a blessing to me—you, my first friend! And don't you know that you're a blessing to that good son of yours, and that he thinks so, and loves you as he ought to do? You mustn't make him unhappy by giving way at this time."

"I don't give way before him, that's not likely. Strong as a rock, child!"

The rock shook and trembled from summit to base, but Mattie did not smile at the contrast which his words suggested.

"What are you doing for him now, sitting here, Mr. Hinchford, and trying to *look* your best?"

"Doing?—what can I do?"

"That's what I have been thinking about, Sir. When I'm at the flower-making—which I'm learning in overtime, because it don't pay just yet—I get, oh! such lots of time to think."

"Well?" he asked, eagerly.

Mr. Hinchford always forgot disparity of age, and was content to be taught by Mattie, and receive advice from her. He wondered at it afterward, but never when the spell of her presence was on him, when her young vigorous mind overpowered his weak efforts to rebel.

"Well, I have thought that Mr. Wesden, being a little—just a little—suspicious, would soon object to the engagement, if Mr. Sidney kept out of work too long. I can't say, for I don't perhaps understand Mr. Wesden, but it has been my idea; and oh, Sir! they are so suited to each other, Harriet and he!"

"Well," he said, again, "I don't think that Mr. Wesden's likely to object; but go on."

"And when I heard that the firm had failed, I began to wonder what he would do; for places are hard to get, even when one's clever, nowadays, and *has* a character to back him. And I wanted to ask you if you had thought of your brother, Sir?"

"Why, what do you know of my brother?"

"He came one night to Great Suffolk Street to see you, don't you remember? I knew him by his likeness to yourself before I saw his name upon his card."

"My brother!"

Mr. Hinchford gave a tug to his stock; it had not struck him before, and its very absurdity rather amused him. His brother, who turned a

deaf ear to his own complaints when misfortune was fresh upon him—when that brother's help might have saved him, as he thought, from all the troubles and adversities which had oppressed him since their bitter quarrel.

"And he's a rich man—I have been asking about him—he's a banker, Sir, and keeps a great many hands."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said, impatiently; "but it's no good. I wouldn't ask a favor of him for the world. If it hadn't been for him my old age would not be like this!"

"He's an old man; perhaps he's altered very much," suggested Mattie; "he might know something that would suit Mr. Sidney."

"Don't speak of him again," Mr. Hinchford said, with some severity.

"Very well, Sir," was the sad response; "then I'll go now."

"Will you not wait till Sid comes back? I'm sure he—"

"No, no, Sir—I would rather not see him. I am pressed for time, and have a great deal to do when I get back. There's one thing more I came for, Sir."

"What's that?"

"I want you to try and remember a letter which you gave me when I went away from Great Suffolk Street."

"A letter—a letter—let me see!"

The old gentleman evidently did not remember any thing about a letter; no letter had seen the light, or all had been explained between Harriet and Sidney, and the course of true love was running smoothly to the end. So much the better; it was as well to say no more about it, Mattie thought. If the letter were lost the old gentleman might only create suspicion by alluding to it upon Sidney's return; Mattie did not know how far to trust him.

She went away a few minutes afterward, stopping for a while to exchange greetings with Ann Packet, to whom she gave her address—a back street in Southwark Bridge Road—after much adjuration.

"You won't mind me, my dear," said Ann, "now you're settled down to something; but oh, dear, how thin you've got! You've been fretting all the flesh off your precious bones."

"I haven't fretted much, Ann," was Mattie's answer; "you know I never liked to do any thing but make the best of it. And I've not tried in vain—all will come right again—I'm sure of it!"

"And the worst is over—ain't it?"

"To be sure, the very worst. And now don't tell my address to any one—not to Mr. Sidney or Miss Harriet especially."

"But Miss Harriet—"

"Will only offend her father by coming to see me—you, Ann, won't offend any one very much."

"On'y a poor stray like yourself, Mattie, am I?"

"And our hearts don't stray very far from those we have loved, Ann; and never will."

"Ah! she talks like a book almost—the sight of learning that that child got hold on, and the deal of good she does a body," muttered Ann, looking after Mattie through the misty twilight stealing up the street.

"For every one her liked, and every one her

loved," wrote Spenser, ages ago, of his heroine. Ann Packet might have quoted the same words, barring all thoughts of Mr. Wesden, whom the force of events had turned aside from Mattie.

Mr. Hinchford liked Mattie; her presence had brightened him up, given a shake to ideas that had been rusting of late.

"She's a quick girl," he muttered; "but she has the most foolish and out-of-the-way thoughts. How she disturbs one! I meant to have asked her seriously, and yet kindly, why she stopped out all night and offended Mr. Wesden. Odd I should forget that—I don't generally let things slip my memory in that ridiculous fashion. And about that man who called himself her father—why, I forgot that too! God bless me! A curious girl—my brother, indeed!—my hard-hearted and unsympathetic brother!"

CHAPTER IV.

HIS TURN!

MR. HINCHFORD did not forget the foolish and out-of-the-way thought of Mattie's. It has been already said that his memory was retentive enough in all things that affected his son's welfare, and the new suggestion kept his mind busy as the days stole on, and Sidney brought back his cheerful face, but no good news with him.

The old man's pride had kept him aloof from the brother for many years; he had been hurt by that brother's coldness, and he had resolved to show that he was able to work his own way in life without that assistance which he had once solicited. He had kept his word. For his own sake it had been easy; but for his son's there was a temptation he could scarcely withstand. There might be a chance, there might not be; in his heart he thought the odds were against Sid. He did not set much value upon the brother's visit to Great Suffolk Street; it might have been curiosity, or a spasm of affection which had rendered him eccentric for a day. He remembered his brother simply as a hard, inflexible being, who, having formed an opinion, closed upon it with a snap, and was ever after that immovable. Still for Sidney's sake he thought at last that he would try. It should not be said of him that he neglected one chance to benefit his son, or that his pride stood in the way of Sid's advancement; that queer girl, whom he could scarcely make out, should not say that he had not done his best for Sidney.

He dressed himself in his best suit one day, seized his stick, and marched down to Camberwell Green, whence he took the omnibus to the City. Sidney had again departed in quest of "something"—on a visit to the news-rooms to search the papers there—and Mr. Hinchford was following in his wake shortly afterward.

He had a nervous fear that he should meet Sidney in the City at first, but the crowd which surrounded him there assured him that that event was not likely to ensue. He had not been in the City for many years, and the place alarmed him; he almost guessed how weak and nervous he had become when he struggled with the mob of money-hunters in King William Street, and found it hard to fight against.

"All these hunting for places in one shape or another," he thought, "looking but for the best chance, and greedy of any one who gets in the way, and seems likely to deprive them of it, or add to their expenses. Why, where's all the places that hold these men and keep my Sid doing nothing?"

He turned into the narrow lanes branching out of the great thoroughfare leading to the Bank, and proceeded without any difficulty to the banking-house of his brother Geoffry. His memory was not in fault here; every short cut through the shady by-ways of the City he took by instinct; he had banked with his brother in days gone by, and it was like retracing his youthful steps to find himself once more in these old streets.

Before the swing glass doors of a quiet, old-fashioned banking-house he paused, changed the stick from his right hand to his left, gave a little tug to his stock, changed hands again with his stick, finally crossed over the way, and set his back against the dingy wall opposite. The pride which had held him aloof so long from his brother rose up again, that ruling passion which a struggling life had circumscribed. He became very red in the face, and looked almost fiercely at the banking-house in front of him. He felt that his brother would say "No" again, and the humiliation in store he should have courted by his own folly. But Sidney?—possibly Sidney might be of service there, and room found for him if he asked; and if not, still, for Sidney's sake, he must attempt it. Courage, and forward!

Mr. Hinchford nerved himself to the task, crossed the road, and went up the steps into the bank. They were busy before and behind the counters there; money was being shoveled in and out of drawers; checks were flying across the counter; there was the stir and bustle of a first-class banking-house before him; every body was talking, whispering, studying, and thinking of money; what room for any sentiment in that place from nine till four?

He took his place by the counter, waiting to address one of the clerks at the first convenient opportunity that might present itself; he was in no hurry; he wished to collect his thoughts and arrange his plan of action; and instead of arranging any plan, he looked at the clerks, and thought Sidney Hinchford might as well have a place behind that counter as not; and how well he would look there, and what a good place for him it would be!

He stood there for a considerable time, until his presence began to oppress a bald-bearded young man at the third desk, an energetic young man of uncivil appearance—soured in life, perhaps, by his hair coming off so early—who, in the hurry of business, had taken little notice of Mr. Hinchford until then.

"What is it?" he asked, abruptly.

Mr. Hinchford objected to abruptness, and felt it hard to be snubbed by his brother's clerk to begin with. He reddened a little, and said that he wished to see Mr. Hinchford directly.

"Mr. Hinchford!" the clerk repeated; "oh! you can't see either of them!"

"Just ask, young man, and don't answer for your master."

"If it's any thing about an account, Mr. Maurice will, if you've a proper introduction, at—"

"Mr. Maurice will not do, Sir!" cried Mr. Hinchford; "go and tell my brother directly that I wish to see him, if you please."

There was some pride in claiming brotherhood with the banker, even under the difficulties before him; the effect upon the uncivil bank clerk—why are bank clerks uncivil in the aggregate?—was bewildering; he stared at Mr. Hinchford, detected the likeness at once, and backed from the counter on the instant. Mr. Hinchford saw no more of him; he was beginning to think that his message had not been delivered after all, when a young man behind touched him on the arm.

"Will you please to step this way?"

Mr. Hinchford turned, followed the usher to the end of the counting-house, passed through a room where two or three gentlemen were busily writing, went through another door into a larger room, where one old gentleman, very like himself, was seated in all the divinity that doth hedge a principal.

"Good-morning, James," was the banker's first remark, nodding his head familiarly in his brother's direction.

"Good-morning, Geoffry."

And then there was a pause; the two men who had parted in anger nearly twenty-six years ago, and had not met since, looked at each other somewhat curiously. It was a strange meeting, and a strange commencement thereto, a little affected on the part of the banker, the senior by eight years. In the same room together the likeness between them was singularly apparent, the height, figure, features, even the scanty crop of white hair, were all identical; but in the senior's face there was expressed a vigor and determination which in Sid's father was wholly wanting. Geoffry Hinchford was still the cool, calculating man of business, who let no chance slip, and who fought for his chances, and held his place with younger men.

There was no sentiment in the meeting of the brothers, and yet each was moved and touched by the changes time had made. They had parted in the prime of life, stalwart, handsome men, and they came face to face in their senility.

"Take a seat," said Geoffry Hinchford, indicating one with the feather of the quill pen he held in his hand.

The brother took a chair with a grave inclination of the head, and then crossed his hands upon his stick, and began to evidence a little of that nervousness that had beset him before he entered the banking-house. Geoffry Hinchford's keen eyes detected this, and he hastened to avoid one of those scenes which he had confessed to his nephew he hated, when he made his first and last call in Great Suffolk Street.

"You have been walking fast, James; will you look at the *Times* a bit, and compose yourself. *That's* the money article."

He passed the paper over to his brother, and then began making a few entries in a small pocket volume before him—a hybrid book, with a lock and key. Mr. Hinchford turned the paper over in his hands, inspected the money article upside down, and appeared interested in it from that point of view—gave a furtive tug to his stock, which he was sure Sid, who always buttoned it, had taken in a hole too much, and

then mustered up courage to begin the subject which had brought him thither.

"Geoffry, it's six-and-twenty years or so since I sat in this very place and asked a favor of you."

"Ah, thereabouts," responded Geoffry from over his private volume.

"Which was refused," added the old gentleman.

"Of course it was."

"Ahem."

Mr. Hinchford cleared his throat with some violence. He did not like this method of receiving his first remarks; it warmed his blood after the old fashion, and, what was better, it cleared off his nervousness.

"One would think that I had got over asking favors of a brother who had proved himself so hard—"

"No," interrupted Geoffry, "not hard: but go on."

"And yet I am here again to ask a second favor, and chance as curt a denial."

"Ah! I did hope, James, that you were here to say, 'I was in the wrong to take myself off in a huff, because my brother would not let me fling some of his money after my own;' or, at least to say, 'Glad to see you, Geoffry, and hope to see you more often after this'—but *favors!*"

"Not for myself, Sir," said Mr. Hinchford, hastily; "don't mistake me, I wouldn't ask a favor for myself to save my life."

"I would to save a shilling; I often do."

"That is the difference between us," Mr. Hinchford answered.

"Exactly the difference. Pray proceed, Jem."

The younger brother softened at the old appellative; he composed his ruffled feathers, and went at it more submissively.

"Look here, Geoffry, I ask a favor for my son. His firm has dissolved partnership—"

"What firm was it?"

Mr. Hinchford told him.

"Smashed, you mean; bad management somewhere: go on."

"And he, who would have been made partner in his twenty-first birthday, has now to begin the world afresh. I thought that you might know of something suitable for him, and would, remembering our common name, do something for him."

"He's a tetchy young gentleman, what I remember of him, in a flying visit. Who the deuce can he take after, I wonder?" and the banker appeared to cudgel his brains with his pen, as if lost in perplexity as to any trait in the Hinchfords identical with "tetchiness." The father did not detect the irony—perhaps would not at that juncture.

"Well," said the banker, "what general abilities has he?"

Mr. Hinchford burst forth at once. The wrongs of the past were forgotten; the theme was a pleasant one; the abilities of his son were manifold; he could testify to them for the next two hours, if a patient listener were found him. He launched forth into a list of Sid's accomplishments, and grew eloquent upon his son's genius for figures, adaptability for commercial pursuits, his energy, and industry in all things, at all times and seasons.

"This lad ought to be governor of the Bank

of England," Geoffry Hinchford broke in with, "there's nothing suitable for such extraordinary accomplishments here. I can only place him at the bottom of the clerks, with a salary of a hundred and twenty to begin with."

"Geoffry, you're very kind," ejaculated his brother; "you mean that—you will really do something for us, after all?"

"Why, your vexatious and frivolous old man," cried the banker, exasperated at last, "I would have always helped you in my own way, if you had not been so thoroughly set upon my helping you in yours. You were hot-headed, and I was ill-tempered and *raspish*, and so we quarreled, and you—you, my only brother—sulked with me for six and twenty years. For shame, Sir!"

The banker evinced a little excitement here; he tossed his pen aside and beat his thin fingers on the book; he spoke his mind out, and amazed his brother sitting at a little distance from him.

"Geoffry—I—I didn't sulk exactly. But you were a rich man, and I was left poor; and if you remember, when I came here last I—"

"If I listen any more to that story, I'm damned!" cried the banker; "it's dangerous ground, and if we get upon it, we shall begin sparring again. Now, Sir—look here."

He stood up, and began laying down the law with the fingers of his right hand in the palm of his left.

"I swallowed my pride by coming to Great Suffolk Street in search of you—that was my turn. We were to sink the past, and be friends, I thought; we two foolish old septuagenarians, with nothing to quarrel about. You swallowed your pride—a larger pill than mine, Jem, for it nearly choked you in the attempt—by coming here, and now it's your turn—eh?"

He held forth both his hands suddenly toward his brother, who answered the appeal by placing his own within them, and holding them in a nervous trembling grasp.

"Amen!" said the banker; and the younger and weaker man understood what he meant, and felt the tears in his eyes.

"And now, I have heard a great deal of your son—you shall see mine."

He left his brother, touched a hand-bell, and a servant immediately responded.

"Ask Mr. Maurice to step here a moment."

"Yes, Sir."

Exit servant; enter very quickly a tall young man of about thirty years of age, fresh-colored, well formed, with curly brown hair, and a long brown mustache, "making tracks," as the Americans say, for his shoulders.

"Maurice, here's your obstinate uncle come to see us at last."

"I am glad to see you, Sir—I think the difference has lasted long enough."

Uncle and nephew shook hands; Mr. Hinchford thought this nephew was a fine young fellow enough—not like his Sid, but a very passable and presentable young fellow notwithstanding.

"We're going to try your cousin as a clerk, Maurice. Any objection?"

"Not in the least," was the ready answer.

"We shall not claim relationship over the ledgers," intimated Geoffry Hinchford; "if he's clever, he'll get on; if he's a fool, he'll get the sack. And we don't expect him, after the general fashion of relations, to cry out, 'See how

my uncle and cousin are serving me, their own flesh and blood, by not lifting me over the heads of the staff, and making my fortune at once!'"

"Sid wants no favors, Sir," said Mr. Hinchford, sharply.

"After office hours we shall remember that he's a Hinchford, perhaps," said the banker.

"Send him when you like, James."

"To-morrow, Geoffry, if you will."

"He's sure to come, I suppose?" asked his brother. "Is he aware of your visit here to-day?"

"No."

"Ah! then it's doubtful, I think. By Gad! I sha'n't forget in a hurry his sermon to me, and his flourish of trumpets over his own independence."

"He will come, Sir, I think."

"Out of place makes a difference," remarked the banker; "we shall see. And now, what can I do for you, James?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing," he said, hastily; "I ask no favors for myself. I'm doing well, thank you, very well indeed. Where's my stick and hat? I—I think I'll bid you good-morning now, Geoffry."

"I shall see you again, I dare say. I can always send a message to you by your son, who will be here to-morrow, perhaps. Good-by, old fellow! Maurice, see to your uncle."

Maurice Hinchford, noticing the feeble steps of the new relation, offered his arm, which was declined by a hasty shake of the head.

"I'm strong enough, Sir—but the meeting has upset me just a little. Geoffry," turning back to address his brother, "we won't say any thing more about that old affair. I think you mean well, after all."

"I hope I did. Good-day."

"Good-day, brother."

Maurice closed the door behind his uncle.

"He's getting quite the old man," said Mr. Hinchford to his nephew; "he had an iron nerve once. He seems very feeble to me—does he enjoy good health?"

"Oh! first-rate health. He's a strong man for his age, Mr. Hinchford. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps he is. You can't expect him like myself, eight years younger than he."

"Well, no," said the nephew, dryly.

"He ought not to worry himself about business at his age. Why, I have given it up myself," he added.

"Oh, indeed!"

Business had given him up; but the old man did not think of it that moment. He was anxious to show the Hinchfords in the best light possible, lest Sid should be looked down upon too much when he came to his new berth.

"And your father must feel the cares of business a little?"

"Not a bit," said Maurice; "he wouldn't be happy out of the bank! He's strong and well, thank God, and one of the best-hearted men and fathers in the world. Too good a father, by half, for that matter!"

"How's that?"

"Oh! it's difficult to explain," was the answer of the nephew, whose cheeks flushed a little at the question; "you'll excuse me now, uncle. Through here and straight across the office—good-day."

He shook hands with Mr. Hinchford, and left him at the door of the inner office which the old gentleman had passed through half an hour since, less hopeful of good fortune in store for the Boy.

CHAPTER V.

"THE NEW BERTH."

MR. HINCHFORD scarcely maintained an equal demeanor until Sidney's return; the burden of good news was almost too much for him, and just to while away the time, and experience the blessed privilege of telling a good story twice, he found out Ann Packet and enlightened her as to the new chance that was presented to Sid.

When Sidney returned, and informed his father that there was no news, Mr. Hinchford bade him not despair, for good luck was sure to turn up in one direction or another.

"Despair!" cried Sidney, cheerfully; "why, I haven't dreamed of despairing yet! Is it likely?"

"Shall I tell you some bad news, Sid?"

"Out with it!"

Mr. Hinchford detailed his dismissal from service at the builder's office. Sidney looked a little discomfited at first, but clapped his father on the shoulder heartily.

"We can bear it, you and I together. You'll be better away from business, and have your health better. I shall be strong enough for the two of us, Sir."

"Good lad; but if nothing turns up."

"Oh! but it will!"

"And, oh! but it has!" cried the father; "now for the good news, Sid, which I have been keeping back till it has nearly burst me."

Mr. Hinchford exploded with his confession, and Sidney listened not unmoved at it. In his heart he had grown dispirited, though not despondent, and the news was grateful to him, and took a load therefrom which had seemed to become a little heavier every day. He would have preferred a clerkship away from his relation's office; but his pride was not so great as his common sense, and he saw the advantages which might accrue to him from an earnest application to business. He remembered, with a slight feeling of discomfort, his past hauteur to the man from whom he now accepted service; but he had had a fall since then, and the hopes of that time, with one bright exception, had been bubble-blown, and met the fate of bubbles. He had been too sanguine; now he was matter-of-fact, and must proceed coolly to work. He had ten years to work in—what would be the end of them? His heart had sunk a little; upon cool reflection he began to doubt whether he had acted well in confiscating the affections of one to whom he might never be able to offer a home.

Still he judged Harriet Wesden by himself, and judged her rightly. If she loved him for himself, she would not care what money he brought her; and if his affection were selfish, knowing what an end to a love-story his life must be, he had concealed nothing from her, and the truth had only drawn her closer to him. He felt that that was his one hope, and he could not be magnanimous enough to insist upon its dissolution, and of the unfitness of his prospects

to her own. When the time came round and left him penniless, or when he saw, three or four years hence, that there was no chance of saving money, and he remained still the clerk with an income that increased not, it would be time to resign her—not now, when she loved him, and he was happy in her smiles, and understood her, as he thought, so well.

He entered upon his novitiate at his uncle's banking-house; his father had not reiterated the hint which Geoffrey Hinchford had given him about relationship, but Sid was a young man who knew his place, add who kept it, and rather shunned his relations than forced himself upon them.

Uncle and nephew proved themselves very different beings to what Sidney had imagined; they were kind to him in their way—they were even anxious he should do the family name credit; they watched his progress, and were quick enough to see that he would prove a valuable and energetic auxiliary.

Geoffrey Hinchford was pleased at his nephew's reticence, and took note of it as he had taken note of most things during his earthly pilgrimage. He even condescended to give him a little advice in the shape of a warning one day.

"Sidney," he said, when chance brought them together in that bank back parlor, "how do you like your cousin Maurice for a master?"

"He is very kind to me."

"Ah! that's it—that's his fault. When I'm gone I have a fear that he will make a muddle of the bank with his easiness. He's the best son that ever lived, I think; but he's too easy."

Sidney did not consider himself warranted in replying to this.

"So take my advice, Sidney, and steer clear of him as much as you can," he said.

"I don't think that the advice is needed, Sir. Our position—"

"Fiddle-de-dee—he never cared for position, and, unfortunately, he's taken a fancy to you. The scamp wanted to double your salary yesterday, without any rhyme or reason, only relationship. Foolish, wasn't it?"

"Well, I don't deserve any increase of salary yet, Sir; it has not been fairly earned," was the frank answer.

"Exactly—now listen to me. I think it is just possible that Mr. Maurice may forget that your salary is small, and that you have a father to keep. Let me tell you that he is an expensive acquaintance, and a little removed from your sphere."

"I know it, Sir."

"Some day it may be different; we can't tell what may happen, but take care of him for a while. A noble young fellow, a good businessman in business hours, but not calculated to improve your mercantile abilities by a closer acquaintance."

Sidney Hinchford considered the warning somewhat of a strange one, and even for a while did his uncle the half-injustice to believe that he spoke more in fear of Maurice "lowering" himself than on account of his nephew forming expensive acquaintances. But Sid soon found the warning worth attending to. It happened, at times, that Sidney Hinchford had extra work after the bank was closed, and the majority of clerks had departed. His cousin Maurice, who

always remained long after his father had gone—he rented apartments in London, while his father went off by train every afternoon to Red-Hill—did occasionally, in the early days of their acquaintance, come to Sid's desk and watch his labors for a few minutes, very intently.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-night, Sidney?"

"I am going home, Mr. Maurice."

"Come and dine with me at my club, and take pity upon my loneliness."

"Thank you, but my father will be expecting me home."

"Oh! the governor can't expect you, at your age, to be always turning up to five o'clock teas."

"You must excuse me, if you please."

"Well, if you'll give me one plain answer to the next question I won't press it."

"I'll give it you."

"Isn't there a young lady your way, as well as the governor?"

"Yes," was the quick answer.

"By Jove! if I didn't think so. Ah! you're a gay deceiver, Sidney, after the bank doors have closed upon you."

On another occasion, and under similar circumstances, he said, in a quick, abrupt way, that almost bordered on embarrassment—

"Has your father any property of his own?"

"No."

"Your salary supports yourself and him entirely?"

"Yes, and leaves something to spare."

Maurice whistled, took up a lead pencil on Sidney's desk, and began scribbling with it on his finger nails. Suddenly he laid the pencil down, saying—

"Oh! that's a thundering sight too bad, old fellow!—we're all Hinchfords, and must alter that. How are you going to marry?—and when?"

"In the usual fashion—and in ten years' time."

"That's an engagement that will never come to any thing, then."

"How do you know?"

"Because long engagements seldom do; and no man, to my fancy, has a right to tie a girl down to such horrible agreements."

"It can't be helped, Maurice," said Sid, a little sadly.

"I'd start in some business. Are you too proud for trade?"

"I don't care about retail—selling ha'porths of something across the counter, wearing white aprons, and so on," replied Sidney; "it's very wrong of me, but it's the Hinchford pride that bars the way, I suppose."

"Try wholesale on a small scale, as a start; the old tea business, for instance."

"Don't you think that I am fit for this, Mr. Maurice?"

"Yes, but it takes time to rise, and you mean marrying. Now, to my fancy, you are a man who would do better in commerce."

"Ah! but then there's capital to sink by way of a beginning."

"I can lend you a thousand pounds—a couple of thousands. I'm a very saving man, Sidney; I'm as certain that you would pay me back again as that I'm standing here."

"You're very kind," murmured Sidney, taken aback by this liberal offer; "but—but, it can't be done."

"Borrow it from my father and me, as your bankers, if you will. My father will not say no to it, I fancy; and if he does, why there's the other resource just alluded to."

Sidney was still bewildered, and at a loss to account for the offer. For an instant he was even tempted; there rose before him the one chance of his life, the happiness of his life with Harriet, forestalled by years; and then he put his hands out, as though to push all dangerous thoughts away.

"Thank you, thank you," he said; "but when I speculate, it must be with my own money. I will not start in life burdened by a heavy debt. You're very kind—far too kind to me, Sir."

"A Hinchford—I never forget that. You don't know how proud I am of my family and all its belongings. And, joking apart, Sidney, we really are a fine family every one of us: And you'll not—well, subject postponed, *sic* die; the bank isn't such a bad place, and we shall give a lift to your salary when you deserve it. Not before, mind," he added, with a seriousness that made Sidney smile, who remembered the anecdote related by the senior partner.

Sidney Hinchford was touched by his rich cousin's efforts to promote his interests by his frankness, his *bonhomie*. Though he held himself aloof from him, yet he respected, even admired him. There was not a man in the banking-office who did not admire Mr. Maurice Hinchford; he had a good word for even the porter; he treated his servants liberally; he was always ready to promote their interests; the cares of money-making, and taking care of other people's money, had never soured his temper, or brought a dark look to his face.

This was the father's anxiety, that Maurice was too easy—that nothing put him out of temper, or chased away the smiles from his good-looking countenance; the banker was glad to see his son happy, but he did wish now and then that Maurice had looked at life less frivolously, and been more staid and sober in his ways. The banker was glad to see him generous; although, if the fit seized him, Maurice was a trifle too liberal with his checks for natural wants, bequests, and monuments; but he was not a spendthrift, and even put money by from the princely share of the profits which he received twice a year.

Certainly it would have been difficult for a single man to run through it without sheer gambling at green tables or on green turfs; and Maurice Hinchford never betted on the red and black, and hated horsey people. He spent all the money a man *could* honestly get through; he fared sumptuously every day, and dressed figuratively in purple and fine linen; it was his boast that he had the best of every thing around him, and any thing second-rate had been his abomination from a child; he was a Sybarite, to whom luck had been waked, and he enjoyed life, and cared not for the morrow, on the true Sybarite principle. But he was not a proud man; he was fastidious in a few things—young ladies of his circle generally, and the mothers of those young ladies especially, thought him *much* too fastidious

—but he was a man whom men and women of all classes liked, and whom his servants idolized.

It was no wonder that his pleasant manners had their effect upon Sidney, who had found few of his own sex to admire in the world, and who knew that the man of whose energy every one spoke well was of his own kith and kin. He held himself aloof, knowing that his ways were not Maurice's ways. When the rich cousin once asked why he so rigidly refused every offer to join him at his club, to make one of a little party at the opera, sharing his box with him, and put to no expense save a dress-coat and white choker, he confessed the reason in his old straightforward manner.

"You're too well-off for me. I can't be your companion, and I'll not be patronized and play the toady. It looks bad in business here, and it will look worse apart from it."

"You're a regular Stoic!"

After a while Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford again asked his nephew what he thought of Maurice.

"A warm-hearted and a generous man, whom I am proud to think is a cousin of mine."

"Yes, just as you say. And very proud I am, too, to think that this dashing, handsome young fellow is a son of mine. He has all the virtues except one under heaven, Sidney."

"We're not all perfect, Sir," said Sidney, laughing.

"Oh! but you are, according to my brother James. He won't see even a flaw in your armor," said the old banker, acrimoniously; "but then he always was aggravating me with something or other, and now it's you."

"I hope not, Sir."

"Well, well, only in one sense of the word. And Maurice has, after all, but a little foible, which the world—the real, material world—always makes allowance for. He will grow out of it. Good-evening."

Sidney did not inquire concerning Maurice Hinchford's foibles, little or otherwise. He knew that foibles were common to humanity, and that humanity is lenient respecting them. He did not believe that there was any great wrong likely to affect the brilliancy of Maurice Hinchford's character; he would be content to resemble his cousin, he thought, if he were ever a rich man like unto him, an honest, amiable English gentleman.

Sidney did not covet his cousin's riches, however. He knew that fortune was not reserved for him; and if he were scarcely content with his lot in life, he was at least thankful for all mercies that had been vouchsafed to him, though he kept his thanks to himself for the greater part.

"If he were scarcely content!" we have said, for Sidney was ambitious of rising by his own merits in the world; a laudable ambition, for which we need not upbraid him. He was careful of his money—a characteristic from his boyhood, a trait that his father, who had been never careful, took great pains to develop. He sank his pride completely for the sake of saving money, and he did save a little, despite the small income, the housekeeping expenditure, and his father to support. On Saturday nights he toiled home from the cheapest market with a huge bag of groceries, to the disgust of the suburban tea-dealer, who wanted a hundred per cent. profit on an indifferent article, and walked with his head rather higher in the air than usual when heavily laden.

"When I can afford it the goods shall be brought to my door," he said, when his father once urged a faint remonstrance; "but I can't study appearances on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. Those fellow-clerks of mine can drop my acquaintance on a Saturday night, and pass by on the other side, if they are inclined. I shall carry my big parcels and exult in my independence all the same."

"Yes, but the look of the thing, Sid."

"We'll study that some day, if we have the chance. *We must keep our eyes open* till the chance comes."

"I did think once that you had all the Hinchford pride in you, Sid."

"I have a fair share, Sir," was the answer, "and I never feel prouder than when I am carrying my plethoric bag under my arm. Proud of myself and of the property I have invested in."

"Then I don't see why I should complain."

"You—to be sure not. Put on your hat, and let us go round to Mr. Wesden's and make up our whist party."

And in this quiet way—winding up the evenings with whist-playing and love-making—the time stole on.

BOOK V.

STORM SIGNALS.

CHAPTER I.

CAST DOWN.

MEANWHILE Mattie, the stray, must absorb our attention for a while. In following the fortunes of the Hinchfords we have omitted to watch closely the progress of our heroine. Yes, our heroine—if we have not called attention to that fact before—and with many first-class “heroical” qualities, which would do credit to the high-born damsels of our old-fashioned novels. She had been heroine enough to make a sacrifice for Harriet Wesden; to take an unfair share of blame for Harriet’s sake; and therefore she ranks as “first lady” in this romance of business-life. She had made the sacrifice of her good name—for it amounted to that—with a sharp struggle; but then she would have given up her life for those to whom her better nature had taught her to be grateful. The girl’s love for all who had rescued her from the evil of the past was ever intense, led her to strange actions, kept her hovering in the distance round the friends she had had once. Hers was a nature strangely susceptible to affection, and that affection was not uprooted because ill-report set its stigma upon her. Hers was a forgiving nature, also, and she thought even kindly of Mr. Wesden when the first shock was over, and she had judged him by that true character which she understood so well.

In her new estate Mattie was not happy; she was alone in the world, and we know that she was partial to society, and not always disinclined to hear the sound of her own musical voice. But she was not disconsolate; she made the best of her bad bargain, and set to work, in her humble way, with something of that doggedness of purpose for which her friend Sidney was remarkable. She had struggled hard for a living, but had never given way. She had met obstacles in her path which would have crushed the energy out of most women, but which she surmounted, not without wounds and loss of strength, and even health, and then went on again. She was matter-of-fact and honest, and those who had doubted her at first—for she had chosen her dwelling-place but a very little way from Great Suffolk Street, and the rumors of a lying tongue followed her, and set her neighbors and fellow-lodgers against her—soon understood her, for the poor are great observers and good judges of character.

In the poor neighborhood wherein she had settled down she asked for advice as to the best method of leading an honest life, and received it from her landlady. She turned dress-maker, and when customers came not with a grand rush to Tenchester Street she asked if she might learn her landlady’s business, artificial flower-making, and offered her services gratuitously, until it pleased her mistress to see that she was the

handiest “help” she possessed. Then her health failed; for she worked hard, lived hard, and had hard thoughts to contend with; and when the doctor told her sedentary pursuits would not agree with her, she went a step lower for a while, and even sold play-bills at the doors of a minor theatre to keep the wolf from her door.

Mattie had one fear of seeing her money melt away to the last farthing, and being left in the world penniless and friendless, as in the days of her desolate childhood. She had no fear of temptation besetting her in her poverty—forever she was above that—but she did not wish to die poor, to seek the work-house, or to be reminded in any way of her past estate. She *would* be above that; she was ever hoping to show Mr. Wesden that she was honest and respected; she struggled vehemently against the tide, and earned her own living at least, varying the mode very often as her quick wits suggested; but never idle, and rising or sinking with the seasons, as they proved fair or sharp ones with the working-classes.

It had been a fair season when she called on Mr. Hinchford last, and she had even found courage to give Ann Packet her address; the sharp season set in after that, and though Ann Packet in her monthly visits was deceived by Mattie’s manner, yet it became another struggle for bread with our heroine. For the season was not only sharp, but Mattie gave way in health over her work for a rascally waistcoat-maker, who drove hard bargains, and did not believe in Charity covering a multitude of sins. And with an opposition clothier over the way, who sported a glass chandelier, and sold fancy vests for three and six-pence, it was hard to believe in any thing.

Mattie gave way more than she intended to acknowledge to Ann Packet, had not that indefatigable young woman made her appearance unexpectedly, and found Mattie in bed at six in the evening.

“Good lor! what’s this?”

“Nothing, Ann—only a little cold, which I have been recommended to nurse for a day,” said Mattie; “don’t look so scared!”

“But why wasn’t I to know it? I might have brought in something good for you,” bemoaned Ann; “if I’m to be kept in the dark who’s to take care of you, my gal?”

“I am taking very good care of myself, Ann.”

“What are you taking?”

“Oh! all manner of things—won’t you believe me?”

“No, I won’t.”

And Ann proceeded to inspect mantle-pieces, open cupboards and drawers, to Mattie’s dismay.

“Yes, I see just how it be,” she said, after her search had resulted in nothing satisfactory. “You’re working yourself to death, and starv-

ing yourself to death, without saying any thing to any body. And that's gratitude for all my love for you—you who want to leave me alone in the world, with not no one to love."

"Why, my dear Ann, I'm not going to die."

"You're trying all you can. Oh, you ungrateful gal!"

Mattie defended herself, and maintained that it was only one "lay up;" but Ann Packet did not like the red spot on each cheek, the unnatural brightness of the eyes, and secretly doubted her assertion.

"I must go back now. I shall come to-morrow, first thing."

"I shall be well enough to-morrow, Ann."

Ann Packet kissed her and departed; half an hour afterward, to Mattie's astonishment, she made her reappearance, accompanied by a tall, slim gentleman.

"There's the gal, Sir. Now please tell me what's the matter, and don't mind *her* a bit."

Mattie saw that it was too late to offer a resistance, and refrained, like a wise young woman, from "making a scene." The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, took the light from the table and held it close to Mattie's face.

"Well, what's the matter, Sir?" was Mattie's question.

"Humph! don't know that I can tell exactly yet. I'll look in to-morrow."

"No, don't do that," said Mattie, alarmed at the expense.

"Yes, do," cried Ann Packet, "your money's safe, Sir. Look to me at 34 Chesterfield Terrace, Camberwell, for it. I'm a respectable maid-of-all-work, with money in the bank."

"It's of no consequence," muttered the doctor; but he entered the address in his note-book like a man of business as he was.

"Shan't I be well to-morrow, Sir?" asked Mattie, anxiously.

"Humph!—scarcely to-morrow, I think."

"Why don't you say what it is?—do you think I'm likely to be frightened at it, even if it's death, Sir? Why, I've lived down all fright at any thing long ago."

"It's a little attack of scarlatina, I think," he answered, thus adjured.

"You only think?"

"Well, then, I'm sure."

"She's had it afore, you know," Ann Packet suggested, "when she was a child. I thought people couldn't have these nasty things twice."

"Oh yes."

"That's enough, then," said Ann Packet, taking off her bonnet and shawl, and putting them on the table as centre ornaments; "here I sticks till you're better."

"Ann—Ann Packet!" cried Mattie.

"Ah! you may say what you like, I sha'n't move. When this gentleman's gone we'll quarrel about it—not afore."

The gentleman alluded to took his departure, promising to send round some medicine in a few minutes. Mattie looked imploringly at the obdurate Ann.

"You *must* go home, Ann."

"Not a bit of it, my dear," said Ann; "I have knowed you for too long a time to leave you in the lurch like this for all the places in the world. And it isn't that I haven't knowed

the Hinchfords long enough to think they'll mind."

Mattie sighed.

"But you keep quiet, my dear, and fancy I'm your mother taking care on you—which I wish I was. And I'll send a boy to Camberwell to tell 'em why I ain't a coming back just yet."

"Let me write a—"

"Let you keep yourself quiet, and don't worry me. I'm going to manage you through this."

"You're very good, Ann," said Mattie; "but if you catch the fever of me!"

"Lor' bless you! I sha'n't catch no fever; I'm too old for changing color, my dear. You might as well expect buff-leather to catch fevers. But don't you remember how skeered I was once when you came in piping hot with it from Kent Street? Ah! I was vain of my good looks then, and afraid they might be spilled."

Ann Packet had been a girl with a bat-catching-against-wall kind of countenance all her life, but distance lent enchantment to the view of the merry days when she was young. And Ann Packet's will was absolute and carried all before it. Mattie was bowed down by it; she felt weaker than usual, and too ill to assert supremacy in her own house. Giving up, she thought that it was comfortable to have a friend at her side, and to feel that the loneliness of a few hours since was hers no longer.

Ann Packet went down stairs and found a boy prepared—for two-pence down and two-pence when he came back—to deliver any message within a radius of fifty miles from Tenchester Street. The messenger departed, returning, in due course, with a favorable, even a kind reply. Ann Packet was to take her own time, and a girl would be found to assist until Mattie was better. Mattie read the note to Ann.

"There, didn't I say so?"

"It's in Mr. Sidney's handwriting," said Mattie, putting the letter under her pillow; "he's always kind and thoughtful."

"Ah! he is."

"As kind and thoughtful as ever, I suppose, Ann?"

"Lor' bless you!—yes."

"What a long while it seems since—"

"Since you've held *your* tongue," added Ann. "Yes, it does. I'd keep quiet a bit now, if I was you."

Thus adjured Mattie relapsed into silence, and Ann Packet, thinking her charge was asleep, stole out of the room a short while afterward, and went into the streets marketing. In the night the fever gained space with our heroine; the next day the doctor pronounced her worse—enjoined strict quietness and care.

"He seems afraid of me," said Mattie, after he had gone, "as if there were any thing to be alarmed at, even if I did die. Why, what could be better for me, Ann?"

"Oh! don't—oh! don't."

"Not that I am going to die—I don't feel like it," said Mattie. "I can see myself getting strong again, and fighting," she added, with a little shudder, "my battles again. There, Ann, you need not look so scared; I won't die to please you."

It was a forced air of cheerfulness, put on to raise the spirits of her nurse; and succeeded to

a certain extent in its object, although Ann told her not to go on like that: it wasn't proper.

Mattie lay and thought of the chances for and against her that day; what if that burning fever and increasing restlessness gained the mastery, who would be the worse for her loss, and might not she, with God's help, be the better? She was scarcely a religious woman; but the elements of true religion were within her, and only biding their time. She was honest, pure-minded, anxious to do good for others, bore no one malice, and forgave all trespasses against her; she went to chapel every Sunday; and she did not feel so far off from heaven on that sick bed. She thought once or twice that she would be glad to die, if she were sure of the future happiness of those for whom she had lived. She would like to know the end of the story, and then—rest. She could not die without seeing the old faces, though, and therefore she must make an effort to exist for her own sake.

In the evening Ann Packet, looking a little scared, said—

"Here's a gentleman come to see you. It's not quite right for him to come up, I'm thinking."

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Hinchford."

"Old Mr. Hinchford?"

"No, the young one."

Mattie, even with the scarlatina, could blush more vividly.

"Mr.—Mr. Sidney!" she gasped. "Oh! he mustn't come in here."

"Mustn't he, though!" said the deep voice of Sidney, from the other side of the room. "Oh! he's not at all bashful, Mattie."

Sidney Hinchford came into the room and walked straight to the bed where Mattie was lying—where Mattie was crying just then.

"Why, Mattie!—in tears!"

"Only for a moment, Mr. Sidney. It is very kind of you to come and see me; and you have taken me by surprise—that's all."

"She's to be kept quiet, Sir," said Ann.

"I'll not make much noise," he answered.

He stood by the bedside, looking down at the stricken girl. The change in her, the thin face, the haggard looks, increased as they were by illness, had been a shock to Sidney Hinchford, though he did his best to disguise all evidence from her.

"Go and sit there for the little while you must remain in this room," said Mattie, indicating a chair by the window, at some distance. "You were rash to come into this place."

"I'm not afraid of fever, Mattie, and I was not going to lose a chance of seeing you—the first chance I have had."

"And you don't think that I have been wrong, Mr. Sidney?" asked Mattie; "you haven't let all that Mr. Wesden has said turn you against me? I'm so glad!"

"Mattie, there's a little mystery, but I dare say you can clear it; and I swear still by the old friend and adviser of Great Suffolk Street. And as for Mr. Wesden—why, I'm inclined to think that that old gentleman is growing ashamed of himself."

"You say nothing of Harriet?"

"She is the champion of all absent friends—the best girl in the world. When I tell her that you—"

"You must not tell her where to find me; you will not act fairly by her if you thrust her into danger, Sir. I rely upon you to keep her away."

"Well, you women do catch things very rapidly," said he; "I—I think that perhaps it will be as well not to let her know of your illness."

"Thank you, thank you."

"But when you are well again I shall bring her myself to see you. We'll have no more games at hide and seek, Mattie."

"Not yet."

"Why not yet?" was the quick answer.

"I am no fit companion for her—her father thinks. So it must not be. I have seen her—watched for her several times."

"Ah! I suppose so. You know that we are engaged, Mattie?" he said. "That was an old wish of yours, Harriet tells me."

"Yes; when are you to be married?"

"Oh! when I can afford to keep a wife. Shall I tell you how I am getting on now?"

"I should like to hear it," said Mattie; "but you mustn't stop here very long, for there is danger."

"I don't believe it," said he, laughing; "besides, my father has furnished me with a lump of camphor as big as my head, which I've been sitting on the last five minutes. Now, Mattie, let me tell you where I am and what I am doing."

In a few words Sidney sketched the particulars of his present mode of life, spoke of his prospects in *fuero*, and of the kindness which he received at all hands. He was an agreeable companion, and brought some of his vigor and good spirits into that little room with him. He spoke cheerfully and heartily, and the pleasant ring of his voice sounded like old times to Mattie. She lay and listened, and thought it was all very comfortable; she even forgot her fever for a while, till she remembered the length of time that he had remained with her.

"I hope you will go now," she said, rather suddenly.

"Am I wearying you?—I beg pardon, Mattie. Some of these days, when you are better, I intend a longer stay than this."

"Indeed!"

"I shall try my own powers of persuasion, in order that Harriet and I may fight your battles better for you," he said. "We must clear up that mystery: I hate mystery."

"I know it."

"Upon my honor, I would as soon have a sister maligned as you!" cried Sidney; "we are such old friends, Mattie!"

"Yes, yes; go now, please. And keep Harriet away, for her own sake and yours."

Sidney promised that, and then shook hands with her.

"You must not be very shocked at my stalking in here; fancy it is your brother, Mattie. I shall make Harriet a clean confession when I get back—not to-night, though."

He went from the room, followed by Ann Packet. Outside, the cheerful look upon his face suddenly vanished, and he became so grave that Ann Packet stared aghast at him.

"Who's her doctor?"

Ann told him.

"I'll send some one myself to see if he's treating her correctly."

"Don't you—don't you think that she's so well?"

"I think that she's very ill—worse than she is aware of herself. Take care of her, Ann; she's an old friend."

He went down stairs hastily, and Ann returned to the room to find Mattie in a high fever, sitting up in bed with a wild look in her eyes.

"Ann, Ann, he must never come again. I—I can't bear to see him now."

"Patience, my darling; keep quiet. Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know—but he makes my heart ache—and, and he is coming into danger here. Oh! Sidney! Sidney!"

She flung herself back in her bed and sobbed and tossed there till the fever grew upon her more and more, and robbed her of her senses. And in the delirium which followed, Ann Packet learned the secret of Mattie's life, and wrung her hands and cried over it.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH SEVERAL DISCOVERIES COME TOGETHER.

WHEN Sidney Hinchford called the next morning at Tenchester Street, to inquire after Mattie's health, Ann Packet met him at the door, and informed him that the invalid was worse, and on no account to be disturbed. In the course of the day a new doctor arrived, commissioned by Sidney; and being a man not inclined to pooh-pooh every system but his own, gave his opinion that Mattie was being treated correctly, and he saw nothing to improve upon. So the doctor was not changed; and being a poor man struggling for a living in a little shop round the corner, I hope he was sufficiently grateful, especially as Ann Packet did not require a twelve-month's credit, but settled his bill every Saturday night with the washer-woman's.

And three Saturday nights went by before Mattie was considered out of danger of the fever's return, and in rather more imminent danger of the exhaustion which that fever had occasioned. Sidney Hinchford had taken Tenchester Street and Southwark Bridge in his new route to the City, and called every morning for the latest news—Ann Packet had brought it down to him with Mattie's kind regards and compliments, and he had not been permitted to see her since that night referred to in our last chapter.

Mattie was getting better when the fourth week was over—learning to be strong, anxious about the expenses that had been incurred, solicitous even about her little dress-making connection, which would have flown to the four winds of heaven had scarlatina thought of taking its measure.

Mattie had found strength to leave her bed and sit up for a while in the chair by the fire-side, when the second visitor astonished Tenchester Street by her arrival. No less a visitor than Harriet Wesden herself—who, having learned Mattie's address by degrees from the unfaithful Sidney, had made an unlooked-for raid upon the premises.

"Don't cry—don't speak—don't say any thing

for ever so long!" she said, with one gloved finger to her pretty mouth; "if there's any thing to get over—get over it without any fuss, my dear."

Mattie was silent for a while—she turned her head away and looked at the red coals. This was a meeting that she thought would come some day; that in her heart she did not blame Sidney Hinchford for promoting, although the danger of it rendered her uneasy.

"Farther away, Harriet," she murmured at last.

"I'm not afraid," said Harriet; "I don't believe that I'm of a feverish sort, or that there's any danger. If there were, I should have come all the same, and stopped just as long after wheedling the address from Sid."

Ann Packet fidgeted about the room; she was jealous of her charge, fearful of Mattie becoming excited, and of Harriet Wesden talking too much to her. Harriet Wesden saw this.

"You may trust me with her, Ann; I will be very careful."

"I hope you will; I shouldn't like the doctor to say I'd let you chatter her off into a fever again. You'll take care, Mattie."

"Yes, Ann."

At the door she paused again.

"You allus were such a gal to talk when once set agoing, Mattie—now dooe be as careful as you can! When I come back from marketing I'll hope it's all done atween you two."

Ann Packet withdrew; the two girls—we may say, despite the difference of position between them, the two friends—looked at each other for a short while longer. Mattie was the first to speak.

"Now you have come, Harriet, you must tell me all that has happened since we parted; every scrap of news that affects you is always welcome to me."

"Shall I sum it up in three words that will content you, Mattie?—I am happy."

"I am so glad—so very glad! Harriet," she added, more eagerly, "you do love him? It isn't a fancy, like—like the others?"

"Mattie, I love him with my whole heart; I never loved before; I feel that the past was all romantic folly. You don't know what a noble fellow he is—how kind and thoughtful!"

"Yes, I do."

"Ah! but you don't know him as I know him; the truth of his inner self, the nobleness of his character, the earnestness of his nature. Mattie, I feel that I have deceived him; that I should have told him all about Mr. Darcy, and trusted in his generosity, in his knowledge of me, to believe it. It was a cruel promise that you wrung from me."

"Harriet, I was thinking of your own good name, and of the story that the world would make from yours. I think I was right."

We wiser people, with principles so much higher, think Mattie was wrong, as she thought herself in the days that were ahead of her.

"And this Mr. Darcy, Harriet, have you seen or heard from him since?"

"I received one letter. I returned it to its writer unopened."

"That was right. And the Eveleighs, what do they know, do you think?"

"Nothing."

"Then we must be safe."

"We?" echoed Harriet; "when you are bearing the stigma of my indiscretion! Mattie, you went out that night in search of me."

"No matter," responded Mattie; "I must not talk too much. Let me hear you speak of all old friends; it's like the old times back again to have you here!"

"And they will come back."

"Never!" was the solemn reply.

"Not that tiresome shop, perhaps," said Harriet, "but the times like unto the old, and all the better for the difference. You know what a weak and sanguine woman I was."

"Well—yes."

"I am a strong and sanguine woman now, and there are good times I brood upon and look forward to still. Shall I sketch you the picture?"

"If you will."

Mattie listened very anxiously; Harriet, with her bonnet in her lap, and her golden hair falling about her shoulders, sat steadfastly looking at our heroine.

"A little cottage somewhere in the country, a long, long way off from this London, which I dislike so much. Sid and I together, and you our faithful friend and housekeeper. Oh! that will come true!"

Mattie shook her head.

"I think not."

"Why, you will not desert us!"

"When the time comes round for the cottage I will give my answer. I think that—I—should—like to come some day, when you have children, perhaps, to take care of *them*. But it is a long, long while to look forward to—almost wicked to build upon, is it not?"

"I don't see where the wickedness lies."

"And as for the country—why in the country, Harriet, when Sidney will have to work in London?"

"He may make his fortune and retire," she said, after a pause.

The secret of Sidney's life was sacred, even from Mattie. Harriet could not dwell upon it without arousing a suspicion.

"I feel that we shall all be together some day; and now before that day comes, let us speak of something else."

Harriet Wesden hastened to disburden herself of all the thoughts which she had had concerning Mattie's future mode of living; if it were dress-making, how Harriet could help her to increase the connection; and, whatever it was, how she, Harriet Wesden, must do her best for Mattie.

All this was very pleasant to our heroine, though it troubled her, and almost mastered her at times. Pleasant to witness the evidence of the old love, of no new love having ousted her from a place in Harriet's heart. With the exception of honest Ann Packet, Mattie had earned no affection for herself, and had stood even isolated from it, until Harriet turned to her as her friend, trusted in her, and—did she ever dream it in the days when she ran barefooted through the London streets?—sought advice from her. And then from that hour Mattie studied Harriet, saw her weaknesses, and did her best to counteract them; moulded her—though neither knew it or would have guessed

it—anew, and helped to make the true woman which she was at that hour.

Mattie felt glad that she had been ill, now: her illness had brought Harriet to her side, and proved that she had lived in all her thoughts.

They were still talking together in the gloaming when the doctor called, bowed to Miss Wesden, and then paid attention to his patient.

"It's very dark," said he, after an ineffectual attempt to see Mattie's tongue; "but you're better, I perceive. Keep still, don't trouble yourself about a light, Miss Gray"—Mattie, for some reason she could have scarcely explained to herself, had assumed the title which Mrs. Watts, in their last meeting, had bestowed upon her—"I have brought a friend to see you to-day, not knowing that you were engaged."

"Who is he?" Mattie inquired.

"A gentleman connected with the chapel—our chapel."

"Indeed!"

"He helps us with the district business when he's in town; and he has been very anxious to see you for the last fortnight, but the young woman who waits upon you said—very rudely, I fear—that she wouldn't have you worried for fifty pence. May he come in?"

Before Mattie had made up her mind he came in without permission. It was difficult to distinguish him in the shadowy room, save that he was short and thin, and moved about with extraordinary celerity.

"When the sinner is too weak to go forth in search of the Word it should be brought to her by all men earnest for sinners' redemption," he said, in a high, hard voice, very unsuitable for an invalid's chamber; "and I trust that Miss Gray will not consider me out of place in coming hither to teach her to be grateful for her recovery."

"She is scarcely recovered yet, Sir," Harriet ventured to suggest.

"What does Miss Gray say?" he said, as though Miss Wesden's word was to be doubted.

"That it is very kind of you to come; but that I am a little weak just at present."

"I called on the doctor—he's not of your opinion—he ought to know best."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor; "but you promised only a few words."

"I am a man of my word," was the brisk answer.

"I beg pardon, I never said that you were not," said the doctor; "but we must be gentle with our patient yet a while—and she has already been receiving visitors to-day."

"If Miss Gray objects I will go."

Mattie said that she did not object, and, without further ceremony, the stranger began to pray for her, lowering his voice when he found that he need not shout at the top of his lungs to be heard in that little room, and even praying with some degree of eloquence, and a more than common degree of earnestness, which was some little apology—if not quite enough—for his unwarrantable intrusion.

It was a long prayer, and spared no one. The doctor, after waiting five minutes, and finding thanksgivings for recovery, and for shortening his bill, not in his line, took his departure on tip-toe; Mattie listened reverently, with her hands clasped in her lap; Harriet, who had not forgiv-

en the intrusion, thought of Sidney more than the preacher, and threw the latter out in his extempore oration by suddenly poking the fire, and then dropping the poker with a crash into the fire-place. Ann Packet returned from marketing, and found the preacher in the middle of the room on his knees, and disgusted with his tactics, after the many times she had denied him admittance, proceeded to arrange the tea-tray and light the candle, with a noisy demonstrativeness that was perfectly unnecessary.

"Amen" sounded at last, and the little man rose to his feet, over which Ann Packet had twice stumbled, buttoned his black dress-coat across his chest, picked up his hat, and proceeded to retire without further words, like a man of business, who, having done his work, was in a hurry to get home. Suddenly he paused and regarded Harriet Wesden attentively. The light in the room was feeble and might deceive him, he thought, for, with a quick hand, he caught up the candlestick and held it nearer to her.

"Miss Wesden—surely?"

Harriet saw nothing to recognize in the wiry-haired, high-cheek-boned preacher. He was a stranger to her.

"Yes, Sir."

"It's not a common name; but I presume not connected with the stationer's in Great Suffolk Street?"

"It was once, before my father left the shop."

"The coincidence never struck me before—that's rather odd, for I'm not generally so dull. You don't remember me?"

"I have never met you before."

"Oh yes!—at the Ashford railway station, in the middle of the night—you claimed my protection from a cruel snare that had been laid to entrap you."

"Hush, Sir!—yes, Sir," said Harriet, with a glance at Ann Packet, who, however, was still busy with the tea-things; "I remember you now; you were very kind to me, and took pains to relieve me from a great anxiety."

"And what has become of—"

"I have never seen him," Harriet interrupted.

"And he hasn't sought you out, and—"

"No, he hasn't. Please say no more about it!" she cried to the inquisitive man; "I have forgotten the story. Mattie, ask him to be quiet."

"How's that possible? How can a—*Mattie!*" he ejaculated, suddenly struck by that name, dropping his hat and then putting his foot upon it in his excitement; "your name Mattie, and acquainted with a Miss Wesden, who lived once in Suffolk Street! And Miss Gray, too!—my name!—*Mattie Gray*, why, it must be!"

"Must be—what!" gasped Mattie, rising in her chair.

"Keep quiet—you're to be kept quiet—the doctor said so," he stammered, fighting wildly in the air with both hands; "don't alarm yourself; try and guess who I am for the next hour and a half. I'll be back by that time; where's my hat? good-evening."

He turned to dart out of the room, and ran against Sidney Hinchford, who had been standing there an amazed listener—*for how long?*

"Break it to her by degrees before I come," he said to Sidney; "I am her father; I have

been looking for her all over the kingdom. Do me this good turn?"

"One moment; I am going your way. Mattie understands it already."

"Sidney!" cried Harriet.

"I shall be back in a few minutes," he said, and then the local preacher and the banker's clerk went out together.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE three women left behind in that little room remained silent from the shock. They were amazed, perplexed. The sudden excitement of the preacher, the strange questions he had asked Harriet Wesden before the name of Mattie had changed the topic of conversation, the presence of Sidney Hinchford as a witness to all this, his abrupt departure with the preacher—all tended to create doubt, and suggest to one, at least, the presence of danger.

Mattie had not given much thought to Sidney Hinchford's appearance; the preacher's excitement, the return of a far-off thought to her, had rendered all that had followed vague and indistinct. The scene had been even too much for her, and she began to slowly close her eyes.

"I think she has been talked and worried to death too much," cried Ann, running to her. "Miss Harriet, I'd go now, if I were you."

"Perhaps I have remained too long," said Harriet, rising.

"No," said Mattie, feebly; "I have been surprised by all that has just happened. You are not the cause."

"I think I would lie on the bed a little while, Mattie," said Harriet.

"Don't go till I feel better."

Mattie lay on the bed as directed; Harriet did not resume her seat, but stood with one arm on the mantle-piece, looking thoughtfully before her, where no fancy pictures lingered now. There was a long silence. Ann Packet placed some smelling salts in Mattie's hand, and then sat at a little distance, watching her. Harriet retained her position until Mattie drew the bed-curtain further back and looked at her.

"I am better now. You will wait till Sidney comes back to fetch you home, Harriet?"

"It is very late. He may not come back."

"He is sure to come," said Mattie; "pray sit down again, and Ann shall make us tea. Harriet, that man is my father."

"Do you really think so?"

"It was all a truth that that horrible woman told me on the day the house was robbed; he has been in search of me; he has found me at last—I shall not be alone in the world ever again!"

"You are glad then, Mattie?"

"Why should I not be?" asked our heroine; "I think that he is a good man—I think that he must have cared for me a little, to have taken so much trouble in his search for me—he will come back soon, and then we shall know all."

"He comes back to your gain and my loss," Harriet was on the point of saying, but checked herself; Mattie was excited enough without the cares of her friend to be added to her own.

It was a silent, thoughtful meal; Ann Packet, absorbed in gloomy reverie, took her tea with stony apathy. She could see that changes were coming toward her also, and the shape that they might assume was hard to guess at. She should lose Mattie perhaps, and that was sufficient to disturb her.

Tea was over, and Mattie had returned to her easy-chair, when a faint rapping was heard at the outer door. Ann Packet went to the door, and found the preacher there, as she had anticipated.

"Is she prepared—has she guessed?"

"Yes."

"Can I come in?"

"It isn't for the likes of me to say you can't;" and with this evasive reply, Ann Packet opened wide the door and admitted him.

He came in on tip-toe, in a manner strangely at variance with his former brusque entrance; he turned to Harriet Wesden first, and spoke in a low whisper to her.

"Mr. Hinchford bade me say, Miss Wesden, that he was waiting for you, down stairs."

"Thank you—is he—?"

Harriet did not know how to finish her sentence, and left it in its embryo condition. Her face was pale, and her heart was beating violently as she stooped and kissed Mattie.

"Good-by, dear, I must go now; Sidney is waiting."

"Good-by; are you not well?" asked Mattie, suddenly.

She was as quick an observer as of yore, and the new expression on Harriet's face suggested the new fear.

"Yes—yes—a little upset by what has happened to-day, that's all. Good-by." And Harriet Wesden departed hastily.

The preacher put his hat on the floor, silently drew a chair toward Mattie, and then sat down close to her side. Ann Packet from the distance watched them both—saw in an instant the likeness between them as they sat thus. Both had sharp black eyes, dark hair, thin noses; the general expression of features was the same, harsher and more prominent in the man; and therefore rendering him far from a being whose good looks were apparent.

"Your name is Mattie?—you were at Mr. Wesden's for some years?—he adopted you?—he took you from the streets?—previous to his kindness you were living, off and on, at a Mrs. Watts, of Kent Street, Southwark, where your mother died?"

"Yes," answered Mattie.

"The woman who died in Kent Street, Southwark, was my wife. She and I started in life together happily enough till she took to drink—oh! the drink! the drink!—and then home became a misery, and we quarreled very much, and I took to drink myself. I lost my place through drink, and laid the fault to her. We quarreled worse than ever as we became poorer and more wretched; I struck her, fought with her, acted the brute, until she ran away from me, taking you with her, then but a year old. I did not seek to find her out: I let her go to ruin, and went my own way to ruin myself, until rescued by a miracle—by a good man whom God sent in my way to amend my life, and teach me all the truths which I had neglected. He found me

work again; he raised me from the brute into the man; he altered me body and soul; and when he died it struck me that I might follow in his steps, and do good unto others, after his example. I was not an unlearned man in all respects; I fancied that I might do good by an effort—there is no doing good without one—and I made the attempt. When I was rewarded by my first convert, Mattie, that was my encouragement," he said, rising with the earnestness of his topic, sitting down again, and flinging his arms wildly about; "that was my incentive to go on, to save fresh souls from the danger, to struggle in the by-ways of life for the light which the evil one would forever shut from us. And I was rewarded for the effort; I have done good; I have spent the last sixteen years of my life in the good cause."

"You are a minister."

"A local preacher—wandering from place to place, as my employers dictate—occasionally proceeding on my own route; forever astir, and letting not the sun go down upon my idleness. And all this while I have been in search of you—tracking your mother at last to Kent Street, and following on your track until I am rewarded thus!"

He held forth his hand, and Mattie placed hers within it.

"I think that you are my father," she said; "I am glad to find some one to care for me at last."

"And you will care for me?—for I have been a lonely man in the world for many years, and would make atonement for the evil act which cast you to the streets. But, Mattie, look at me!"

Mattie regarded him long and steadfastly. It was a strange, hard-featured face, on which was impressed firmness, or obduracy, and little else; but she felt that he was to be trusted and believed.

"You see a very stubborn man, one who has made few friends in life, and who has met with much tribulation in his journey," said he; "you see a man who will do his duty by you, but will not be a gentle father—a man who will never win a daughter's love, and will not let the daughter take the first place in his heart, lest she should wean him too much from the pursuit of sin, and slacken his zeal in the good cause. A man who is poor—who can not offer you a home much better than this—a man disagreeable, irritable, and obstinate—is he worth calling father?"

"Yes."

"Thank God you say so; it is very horrible to feel alone in the world."

The disagreeable, irritable, and obstinate man shook Mattie by both hands, kissed her suddenly on the forehead, drew forth a cotton handkerchief, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose vigorously; finished by producing a shabby leather purse, and taking some silver therefrom, which he placed on the mantle-piece.

"My child! at my expense all future house-keeping. Young woman," to Ann Packet, "you'll draw from that small amount for the future."

"I'm sure I sha'n't!"

"Eh! what?"

"I've taken care of her, and been a mother to her for the last four weeks, and you're not

a-coming in here all at once, and stealing every bit of comfort away from me!"

"Who is this?" he asked of Mattie.

"A faithful friend, without whom I might have died."

"Then she must be a friend of mine—young woman, you hear that?"

"Ah! I hear," said the stolid Ann.

"And who knows but that you, Mattie, in the better days in store for you and me, may become a worker in the vineyard also?"

"She's not going to work in any yard yet a while, if I know it!" said Ann.

Mr. Gray rose and picked up his hat again, without paying heed to this allusion.

"I have work to do at home," he said; "I am a mechanic by trade, and have to labor to get my own living; when you are well enough, you must come to my home and make it a different place. I have much to ask you when you are better—I have been troubled about stories that have been told me of you—I am unhappy until I know the truth. You will keep nothing from me?"

Mattie did not reply; that was a matter for future consideration.

"I never allow any thing to be kept from me," he said; sharply; "I shall be a hard father, rely upon it. I allow nothing for prevarication, and I spare no sin or weakness, however plausible may be the excuse which the sinner offers. I—how dreadfully askew every thing is on this mantle-piece!" he added, suddenly, putting the few ornaments thereon at regular distances from each other; "I shall not be a kind father—I know I sha'n't! The mountains are not harder to move than I am; you're not frightened at me, Mattie?"

"No."

"Not sorry I have come here to claim you?"

"No—glad," said Mattie; "I think I shall be able to trust you, and to understand you in a little while. And the world will never be entirely desolate again."

"Neither for you nor for me—though I have had my pursuits, and been working hard for my master on earth—my Master in heaven. Amen. He has been very kind to me to reward me thus for the little which I have done of late years!"

He was down on his knees in the old place, and praying again; offering a thanksgiving for his daughter's restoration to him. He was a man who cared not for appearances—who doubtless rendered himself extremely ridiculous and objectionable at times—and yet a man so thoroughly in earnest that it was hard to laugh at him. At first sight, it was difficult to understand him, although Mattie already felt confidence in him, and saw a brighter life in store for her; he was a man whose character was hard to define at a first interview.

The time was inappropriate; the prayer out of place; he might have waited till he had got home, thought Ann; but after a while the deep voice arrested attention, and Mattie listened and was impressed by the man's fervor and rugged eloquence. It was not a long prayer; he was on his feet again, and looking at his daughter once more.

"I shall come to-morrow; next week perhaps we shall be living together, father and child! Dear me, how odd that sounds now! With you

at my side, I feel I can confront my enemies better."

"Your enemies?"

"Such as they are—I am not afraid of them—I rather like them," he added; "they laugh at me, and mimic my ways—shrug their shoulders, and tell one another what a hypocrite I am. It's the easiest thing in the world to say a man is a hypocrite, and the very hardest for that man to prove that he is not. But we'll talk about that, and about every thing else when you're better. I—I hope I haven't been *going it* too much—good-by."

"Good-by, father."

"Ah! that's very good of you," he said; "but you must not be too credulous. I'll bring my marriage certificate to-morrow, and we'll proceed in a more business-like fashion. Good-by—good-evening, young woman."

"Good-evening, Sir," said Ann, evidently inclined to be more civil to him. When he had gone Ann Packet insisted upon putting Mattie to bed at once; she was inclined to keep her place and talk of the extraordinary incidents of that day.

"Talk of 'em to-morrow," said Ann; "you've galked your brains enough for fifty fathers."

"I feel so much happier, Ann, with some one whom I shall have a right to love."

"Well, you've a right to love who you like, o' course."

"And I sha'n't love my faithful, gentle nurse the worse for it."

"God bless you!—what a gal you are!"

"Life seems beginning with me for the first time, opening new scenes, new faces, new affections. Yes, Ann, I am happy to-night."

"Then I'm glad he's come—I think he's turned up for the best; although," she muttered to herself, "I shouldn't be very proud of another father like him for myself. He's *such a rum 'un*!"

Meanwhile Harriet Wesden—what had followed the coming of this "rum 'un" to her? Was her happiness fading away as Mattie Gray's advanced? Let us see.

CHAPTER IV.

"ONLY PITY."

A COLD, frosty air in the streets that night—a chilling welcome to Harriet Wesden as she emerged from the hot room into Tenchester Street. Sidney was waiting for her, staid, silent, and statuesque; he offered her his arm, which she took, and together they proceeded along the narrow street into the Southwark Bridge Road—thence past the old house in Great Suffolk Street toward the Borough.

Harriet Wesden felt that she would have given worlds, had she possessed them, to have broken the silence, and ventured on some topic which might have tested the truth or the folly of her fears; but all thought seemed to have deserted her.

These sudden vacuums are difficult things to account for; most of us suffer from them more or less at some period or other of our lives. Who can not remember the sudden hiatus with the friend—male or female—whom we intended particularly to impress with the force of our elo-

quence; or the collapse in the grand speech with which we wished to return thanks for the handsome manner in which our health had been drunk at that dinner party, or the vote of confidence placed in us at that extraordinary general meeting?

Harriet Wesden was dumb; there was not one thought at which she could clutch; even the coldness of that night did not suggest itself till it was too late to speak, and the idea began to impress her that it would be more unnatural to say a few commonplace words than to keep silence.

She guessed that Sidney knew her secret, or the greater part of her secret, the instant that she had emerged into the street; and to attempt a commonplace discourse with a great sorrow overshadowing him would, after all, have been a mockery, unworthy of herself and him.

But if he would only speak!—not proceed onward so firmly, steadily, saying never a word to relieve the embarrassment of her position. Sidney Hinchford maintained a rigid silence for almost a similar reason to Harriet's: he was at loss how to begin and break the spell which had enchained him since his engagement. He was walking in darkness, and there was no light ahead of him. All was vanity and vexation of spirit.

At last the silence was broken. They had left behind them the long rows of lighted shops, and come to private houses, and long dreary front gardens, with interminable rows of iron railings; there were a few late office-clerks—a shadowy woman or two—hastening homeward; the roar of London was growing fainter in the distance.

"Harriet," he began, in a deep voice, wherein all excitement was pent up and constrained, "I have heard a strange story to-night from that man claiming to be Mattie's father; is it true?"

"Yes."

She did not ask what he had heard, or attempt any defense; the sound of his voice, deep and resonant after the long silence, had set her heart beating, and rendered her answer a matter of difficulty.

"It is a strange story, and I have been hoping it might have been explained away by some means not only unnatural—I can almost believe that it is all a dream, and no cruel waking is to follow it. Harriet, may I ask if your father is aware of this?"

"He is not yet."

"You were traveling alone with a gentleman—I will call him a gentleman for the sake of argument—in the middle of the night by the Dover mail-train; at Ashford you leave the carriage abruptly, and demand protection from him—speak of a trap into which he had led you, and seek counsel of that man we met at Mattie's house to-night?"

"But—"

"But do not misunderstand me, Harriet—I can read the story for myself; I can see that you were deceived in this man, and had no consciousness of the snare prepared for you, until the hour was too late. I can believe that your sense of right was outraged, and the gentleman merited all the scorn which he received; but who was this man to whom you could trust yourself at that hour, and by what right were you, under any circumstances, his companion?"

"He was a man I met at Mrs. Eveleigh's—he offered to escort me to the railway station."

"A stranger?"

"No—I had met him at Brighton before then, when I was a school-girl. He—he paid me attentions there which flattered my girlish vanity; and—and then I met him again at Mrs. Eveleigh's."

"What is his name?"

"Darcy."

"You have not seen him since?"

"No—I hope that he and I will never meet again."

"Harriet, you loved this man!"

"No," was the fearless answer; "I can not believe that now. I might have fancied so at the time—for oh! I was bewildered by many thoughts, and my heart was troubled, Sid—but I never loved him, on my honor!"

"It is easy to think that now," said Sidney, in reply; "the idol has fallen from the pedestal, never to be replaced again—a ruin, in which no interest remains. But you loved him, or believed you loved him at that time—it is a nice distinction—and there was no thought of me and my hopes."

"Sidney, I wrote—I—"

"Harriet, there is no need for us to say one word in anger about this," he interrupted; "I will ask no further explanation—I do not wish it. I can see now where I have been wrong, and whither my folly was leading me—and there's an end of it," he added.

"An end of—what?"

"Of the one hope that I have had. I see, now, how much better it is for you and me, and what a foolish couple we have been."

There was a long silence; they had walked on some distance before Harriet said, suddenly and sharply—

"What do you mean—what am I to understand?"

"That our engagement is at an end, and that it is better for us both to forget the romantic nonsense which we talked of lately. I will not ask you to forget me; I will not try for a single moment to forget you. I will prefer, if you will allow me, Harriet, to remain your friend—something of the old boy-friend I was to you, before the dream came."

"Unjust, unkind!" she murmured.

"No, you will not think that presently," he answered; "you will judge me more fairly, and see for yourself how it could not have ended otherwise for either of us. You have been more than kind to me; you have offered me the sacrifice of your best wishes, even your brightest prospects, out of pity, and I can not have it."

"Pity!" she repeated.

Harriet was unnerved at his earnestness, at the deep sorrow which betrayed itself in every word, and which he thought that he disguised so well; but her pride was wounded also at his resignation of her, and she could see that there was no defense to urge which, by the laws of probability, had power to affect him. Between her and him that cruel past, which she had hidden from him; that proof of love or fancy for another, when he was building on her love for him; that evidence against her, which forever robbed him of his confidence and trust. No, there was no defense, and the scornful echo of

his last words were more like defiance than regret.

"Yes, pity!" he reiterated—"only pity! Harriet," he said, for an instant pressing her hand upon his arm with the old affection: "it was kind and noble of you, but it was not love. It was a sacrifice; I was a poor man; there was a great affliction in store for me, and you felt that you alone could lighten it in the present—and in the future, when it faced me and shut me in with it. You saw that you were my one hope, and you took pity on me. It was a mistake; I see the gigantic error that it was now!"

"You will see the truth; you will judge me fairer yet, Sidney."

"This past engagement between us, Harriet, has been a trouble to me lately," he continued; "my selfishness has scared me before this, and I have felt that I had no right to bind you to me for a term of years, ending in calamity at the last. I was wrong; I retract; I am very sorry for the error; I am glad of this excuse to rectify it."

"You say that!" cried Harriet; "you are glad to break with me—to believe that I did not love you, Sidney?"

"Yes, I am glad. I can see that it was all for the best; and though I could have wished that there had been a different reason for the parting, still it takes a weight from my conscience—it is a relief!"

It was a struggle to say so, but he said it without bitterness and in good faith. By some ingenious method of word-twisting, which Harriet could not follow, he had stopped all effort to explain more fully, and turned the blame of the engagement on himself. There was no answering. She saw that his heart was wrung with the agony of the dissolution; but she read upon that pale, stern face, to which she glanced but once, an inflexible resolve that nothing could alter. He upbraided her not; he uttered not one sarcasm upon the folly of her past passion for Mr. Daroy, or the mistakes to which it had led. He expressed a wish to be her friend still; but he gave her up; and with all her love for him—and she knew how truly it was love then—she could not ask him to reconsider his verdict and spare her a parting as bitter for her as him. She read in that hasty glance at his face *incredulity* of her affection for him; and no protestation on her part could have altered that. Yes, it was ended between them—perhaps for the best, God knew; she could not think of it then—she was ashamed, miserable, utterly cast down!

"Let me get home," she murmured; "what a long way it is to home!"

"I will say no more, Harriet; I have been unkind to say so much," he said, in answer to that cry, in which he might have read the truth had not his heart been forever closed to it from that night.

So, in the same silent way as they had begun that inauspicious walk, the two concluded it, reaching the little house of Mr. Wesden shortly afterward. Colder and more grim the night there; beyond the lighted London streets, in melancholy suburban districts like to this, there seemed to lurk a greater desolation.

"Good-night," he said; "don't think that we part in anger, or that I am hurt in any way at what has happened, or that I am less your friend than ever, Harriet."

"Good-night," was all her answer.

He lingered still, as though he had more to say, or was endeavoring to think of something more to render the disruption less abrupt and harsh; but he relinquished the attempt, and left her, walking away rapidly, as though at the last—the very last—he feared to trust himself.

He did not go straight home, but walked for a while up and down the street wherein his home was at the same rapid pace, with his breath held somewhat, and his hands clenched.

He had acted for the best—it *was* for the best, he thought!—but the result was not satisfactory, and the future beyond was the gray density at which he had recoiled when crossing the Channel on the day he came to man's estate.

If he had died on that day, or the ship had gone down with him, how much better he thought then; better for her, for him—even for his father, perhaps, he could not tell at that time!

He went indoors at last, feigned for a while the old demeanor, and failed at a task beyond his strength for once. He gave it up, and, looking vacantly at his amazed father, said,

"I'm not well to-night. I think I'll go to my room."

"Not well!—you not well, Sid?" exclaimed the father, as though the assertion were the most improbable to make in the world.

"Not very well—a head-ache."

"Ah! too much book-work. Be careful, Sid, don't overtask yourself."

"I shall be well enough to-morrow. Good-night."

He left the room abruptly, and turned the key in his own apartment a few minutes afterward. In his own room he hunted for a few letters which she had written to him during their brief engagement, and proceeded to burn them in the empty fire-grate.

"So much the best," he muttered, "so much the best!" as though they were charmed words, that kept him strong.

He missed something else, and was uneasy about it. He went to the looking-glass drawer, and turned out the whole contents upon the toilet-table—staring at a letter soiled, crumpled, and torn, but still *sealed*, which rewarded his search, and lay at the bottom:

"What's this?" he muttered.

He drew a chair nearer the drawers on which the light was placed, examined the post-mark, the superscription, the seal, then opened the letter, dated on the day he went away on special service.

A long, confused epistle, written with difficulty and under much agitation, but telling one truth, at which he had guessed—which he had spoken of that night.

"I knew it before!" he cried; but the news daunted him, and unmanned him notwithstanding.

It was the climax, and he gave way utterly.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNAVAILING EFFORT.

THE dry, matter-of-fact world, with its face to business and its back to romance, is still interested in love-matters, and passingly agitated

by the sudden disruption of any love-engagement. It shows an interest in the latest news, and turns from its account-books for a while to know how it came about that Damon and Phyllis could not agree upon "proprieties," and thought that it was better to part, for good and aye, than to settle down for good as man and wife. Having learned the news, remarked upon the pity that it was, or the best thing that could happen for *her* or for *him*, the world goes upon its course again, and the story is as old as the hills before the leading characters have got over their first heart-pangs.

It was not a large world that was interested in the disruption of Sidney Hinchford's love engagement; two old men at Camberwell, and a needle-woman, might almost constitute it in this instance. We say almost, for a reason that will appear presently; a cautious writer should always speak with a reserve.

The two old men were interested in the news, but not profoundly affected; such is the selfishness of humanity, when matters do not seriously affect its own comfort.

Harriet Wesden told the news on the following day to her father, and he, after a stare over her head in the old fashion, thought, perhaps, that it was all for the best. Harriet told him the whole story of the past that had led to the parting, and he took stock of the principal features, and thought it was an odd affair, and that he might have been told of this Mr. Darcy a little earlier. After a while he fancied that it was more comfortable to know that Harriet was to be always with him, to attend to his small ailments, and study his eccentricities. Of late he had harassed himself somewhat with the idea that there would be an early marriage, and that he should be left entirely alone in the world—with that house and new furniture, that wash-house where the chimney always smoked, and that back-garden where groundsel grew vigorously in the garden paths. The news of the quarrel came with something like a relief to him. Harriet always at home; no one calling to distract attention away from him; well, it *was* for the best, though in his unselfish moments, and he had many of them, Harriet alone in the world after he was gone, was a picture that affected him.

There was something else to trouble him now; Harriet's story had cleared up the mystery of Mattie's actions, that last mystery which had led to an act of injustice on his part. That he had been unjust, and cast Mattie back to the streets, troubled him far more than the broken love-pledge between Harriet and Sidney. For the first time in his life he had done a wrong, a palpable and cruel one, which might have submerged a soul, and he was sorry, very sorry, for all that had led to it. It did not matter that Mattie had been rescued from utter loneliness by the appearance of her father upon the scene; his hasty judgment had only brought about the wrong, and he had tried to walk uprightly all his life, and do his best according to his powers.

Harriet, his daughter, kept her troubles to herself; she had met with the first shock that falls to the share of many a young life, and she had not made up her mind as to the best method of bearing up against it. Two years ago this would not have been a great trouble to her; but

two years had wondrously sobered her, and her eyes had only been opened to the true estimate of Sidney's character at the time when he spoke of the necessity of ending all engagement between them. He had not blamed her, or she might have defended herself; he had spoken of his own consciousness of having done wrong to bind her by a promise made in an impulsive moment, he had intimated that it was a relief to him to give her up, and in the face of the cold, unpitiful world, she was powerless to act. Still she was hopeful amidst it all; it was no serious quarrel: he had spoken of his wish to remain her friend, and by one of the many chances of life, it would not be difficult for him to discover that it *was* love which drew her to him, and not the pity which is akin to it. It might all be explained when the right moment came round; but as the days passed, and no Sidney appeared, her heart sank more, and she read the future in store for her through a medium less highly colored by her fancy.

A week after the explanation between Sidney and her she went in search of Mattie. Always in trouble thinking of Mattie—seeking from her that consolation which her own thoughts denied her. Mattie was still in Tenchester Street, although Ann Packet had gone back to the Hinchford service. Mattie was strong enough to shift for herself again—to set about packing her scanty wardrobe for removal to her father's home; she was alone and busy with her preparations for departure when Harriet Wesden came into the room.

After the first salutations had been exchanged, and flying remarks upon Mattie's better health and brighter looks had been made, our heroine looked steadily at Harriet and asked what was the matter.

"Am I so altered that you should think any thing had happened, Mattie?"

"There is not the look I like to see *there*," said Mattie, pointing to Harriet Wesden's face.

"It's not a happy look, is it?" she asked, with a little sigh.

"Not very."

"Sit down here beside me, and let me tell you why the happy looks have gone forever."

"Forever! Oh! I'll not believe that."

"You'll never guess what I am going to tell you?"

"Sidney and you have quarreled."

"Yes—no—not exactly quarreled—what a girl you are to guess things! Sidney and I, by mutual consent, have canceled our engagement."

"I am sorry," said Mattie, after a moment's silence; "sorry, not that the engagement has been broken for a while, for it will be renewed again—"

"Never! never!"

"But that any difference should have arisen between you two. As for not making it up again," said Mattie, cheerfully, "oh, we can't believe that, we two who understand Sidney Hinchford so well."

"There will never be an engagement between him and me again," said Harriet; "over for once and all, Mattie."

"I say there will be," said Mattie, in an equally decisive manner. "Have I lived so long to see it all ended thus? I say it shall be!" cried Mattie, in an excited manner, that

surprised even Harriet, who knew Mattie's character so well; "and we shall see, in good time, which is the true prophetic."

"Mattie, you don't know Sidney after all."

"Tell me the story; I am very anxious."

And with a woman's keen interest in love-matters—her own, or any body else's, as the case might be—Mattie clasped her hands together and bent forward, all eagerness for Harriet's narrative.

"It's all through your father—that father of yours, who comes upon the scene and brings misery with him at once," said Harriet, a little petulantly.

"Hush, Harriet! remember that he is my father now!" said Mattie, who had found one more to defend in life, and to live for; "and I am learning to love him, and to understand him better every day."

"Yes, yes, you will forgive me; I am always offending some one with my hasty words. This is how the quarrel came about."

Harriet launched into her story at once; in a torrent of hurried explanations the details were poured forth, and Mattie, in a short while, knew as much as Harriet Wesden, which was not all however, as we, who are behind the scenes of this little drama, are aware.

"Perhaps it serves us right," said Mattie, pluralizing the case after her old fashion; "we kept something back, and Sidney is straightforward in every thing, and hates deceit, even innocent deceit like ours, practiced for your good name's sake. Did you tell him that?"

"I don't know what I told him," answered Harriet, sadly. "I said nothing—I was found guilty, and there was no answer left me."

"We shall live this down, I think," said Mattie, confidently. "After all, there's nothing very serious about it—if he don't suspect us of behaving wrongly on that night."

"Sidney suspect that of me! Oh! no, no—not so bad as that!"

"Then it will all come right in time," cried Mattie. "He has loved us all his life, and will not fling himself from us in his pride and anger, as—as other men would do, more selfish and unjust than he. I see the future brightening—we will wait patiently, and not be cast down by this slight trouble."

"Slight trouble!" exclaimed Harriet. "Oh, Mattie! if you only understood what love was like, you would guess my—my sense of desolation."

Harriet flung herself on the bosom of the old faithful friend, whose face, over her shoulder, became suddenly, and for an instant only, very white and lined.

"I will try and guess," she said, in a low voice. "It must be desolate; I—I may know better some day!"

Then Mattie set herself the task of comforting this child—a child still, she thought, in her impulsiveness, and in that weakness which gave way like a child at the first trouble, and sought help and comfort from others, rather than from her own heart. And Mattie, who had the gift—that rare rich gift above all price—of comforting those who are afflicted, succeeded in putting the facts of the case in their best and less distorted light, and was rewarded before the interview was over—and when Harriet remembered it—by the new fact of how one revelation had brought

about another, and cleared up the mystery of Mattie's absence from home to the man who had suspected her.

"I broke the promise—there was nothing to keep back when I had my own story to relate."

"He knows all this," said Mattie, "and he—"

"He is very sorry for all that harshness which drove you from us—I am sure of it."

"Why, it is brightening all round," said Mattie; "we shall have no secret in the midst of us, and all will be well now!"

Both had forgotten the letter, wherein absence of all true affection was asserted; Harriet believed it destroyed, and Mattie did not think to remind her of the danger—in her heart believed it even far removed from her.

They parted hopefully; Mattie made the best of the position, and was really trustful in a good result. Sidney Hinchford loved Harriet, and she could not understand a man loving on and yet holding aloof from the idol he would fain worship still.

Sidney Hinchford, a few days afterward, came to make his last inquiries concerning Mattie's health—had he waited another day he would have found empty rooms and a desolate hearth—and Mattie seized that opportunity to say a word. The grass never grew under the feet of Mattie Gray, and the dark look—new to his face in its intensity of sternness—did not deter her.

"I am sorry to hear the last news, Mr. Hinchford."

"It was to be expected," he replied, shortly. He would have hastened away from a subject that distressed him, but Mattie was not deterred by his harsh voice.

"Not to be expected, you mean, Mr. Sidney," she said; "for she and you, who have been together all your lives, should—"

"Pardon me, Mattie," he interrupted, decisively; "I can not bear a third person's interference in this matter. It lies between her and me, and both she and I have thought it better to part without reproach or ill-will. She has made up her mind—"

"But—"

"And had she not," he said, catching at Mattie's wrist and holding it firmly with his hand, as though to stay her defense by that means—"I have made up mine, and there is nothing on earth or in heaven to alter it, I swear!"

"Oh, Sir!" cried Mattie, dismayed at this assertion, "you will think of this again—for her you have known from a little child, and should be able to trust! There's not a truer, kinder heart in all the world!"

"She is true and kind—she would even have sacrificed her happiness for my sake; but she never loved me. I have her written evidence to that."

"The letter!—oh! the letter!"

"You knew it?—you helped to deceive me too?"

"Not deceit—all was done for your own good, Mr. Sidney; she did not know her own mind when that letter was written; she—"

"She will never know it—she is a weak woman—God help her! She was never fit for me!"

"Yes," was the quick denial.

"No, I say. A thousand times no!"

He stamped his foot upon the floor, and then turned away, sterner and darker in his looks than ever. Mattie's heart sank then; for she read in his face a resolve that love could not soften or time ameliorate. She lost hope herself from that day.

"I must make up for him as well as I can," said Mattie, after he had gone; "she must not break down because he turns away. She is young and will get over it; let me see, now, how shall I teach my darling to forget all this?"

CHAPTER VI.

MR. GRAY FURTHER DEVELOPED.

THAT is a grand trait of character in man, woman, or child—unselfishness. It is a trait that scarcely exists, perhaps, in its pure state; for we are selfish mortals, struggling to cut one another's throats all our lives, and coveting our neighbor's goods with a rare intensity. It is a selfish globe on which we are spinning, and it is natural to think deeply—think altogether, perhaps—of our loves, our successes, our chances of fame, fortune, happiness, rather than of other people's. For the reason that it has been our lot to drop upon an exception to this rule—as near an exception as this rule *sans* exception will allow—do we hold Mattie a first place in our affections, and think her story—approaching its turbulent stage—worth the telling.

Springing from a low estate, and saved as by a miracle, this flower put forth strange buds and blossoms after its transplanting. It outlived the past and turned quickly to the light, as though light had been its craving from the first, and only a better chance, and a purer moral atmosphere, were needed to wholly change it. Mattie passed from evil to good swiftly, grateful to the hands that had been outstretched to save her; the untaught childhood became swiftly the days of grateful girlhood; and from girlhood to the gentle, honest womanhood, that thought of others' happiness, and strove hard for happiness in those she loved, was but another step, easily made and never repented of.

She did all for the best, and strove hard to make the best of every thing—for others. We know no better heroine than this, and I am very doubtful if we care for one better educated or of higher origin. And yet, Heaven be thanked, not a model heroine, who was always in the right!

Mattie removed to her father's apartments in Union Road, Brunswick Street, New Kent Road. Brunswick Street is an artery that lets the wild blood of Great Dover Street into the New Kent Road—a quiet street by day, but subject to scared strangers at night in search of the medical students who locate here in legions. Union Road is on the right of Brunswick Street, and a near cut, if you are fortunate enough not to lose yourself, to Horsemonger Lane Jail, though what you may want *there* is more your business than ours. Mr. Gray rented the two top rooms of a small house in Union Road, the sitting-room provided with a sofa bedstead, which was henceforth to be of service to Mattie, when the day's duties were over, and Mr. Gray had finished his praying.

Here settled down the new-found father and child, and began "home" once more. Here Mattie learned by degrees to understand her father, to appreciate the many good qualities which he possessed, and to "make allowance"—as she always made allowance—for the few bad ones, which he possessed also, minister of the gospel as he termed himself.

They agreed very well together; there was little to disturb the even tenor of their way; and it fortunately happened that Mr. Gray, who was fond of argument, was blessed with a daughter who always shunned it, when the topics did not directly affect her. Mr. Gray, on the whole, was a little disappointed in his daughter—agrecably disappointed, we might have said, had not the discomfiture been so apparent on his features for a while. He was a man fond of making converts; it had been his profession, and he had met with success therein. He had promised himself the pleasure of saving his daughter from the dangers and temptations of the world, and he had found one who was out of danger and as above temptation as he was. From Mrs. Watts's account, subsequently from Mr. Westcott, he had been led to expect a very different daughter to this; a girl who had run the streets for eleven years—who had been a friendless stray upon those streets, a thief and beggar at intervals when honesty did not *pay*—who had afterward left her master's house under suspicion of a grave character—was likely to be a willful, vicious specimen of womanhood, and worthy of his earnest efforts to subdue. Though he would not have owned it to himself, yet the belief in Mattie being unregenerate and defiant had added an intensity to his search for her: since his own better life, he had been ever in search of a thoroughly fine specimen of impenitence to practice upon, and now even his own daughter had disappointed him!

He discovered that she was a regular attendant at chapel—not even at church, to whose forms he had the true dissenter's objection; that she read her Bible regularly, and took comfort from its pages; that she was gentle, charitable, kind, unselfish, every thing that he would have liked to make her by his intense love and application, and which he had found ready-made to hand.

He returned thanks for all this in his usual manner, but there was an occasional blankness of expression on his countenance. He was truly glad to have discovered his daughter, but he found that she was never to owe him an immense debt of gratitude for her reformation, and he had built upon that whenever they were thrown together, father and child, at last. Beyond his home he must look once more for the obdurate specimen that he could attack, follow up, analyze, and dissect, with the gusto of a surgeon over "as fine a case as ever he saw in his life!"

But that home—in a very little time what a different place it was to him! He found in Mattie all that he could have made of her, and after a while he was more than content. He was a man who made but little show of earthly affection, and possibly deceived Mattie, who took his love for duty more often than he wished, though it was his pride to abjure all evidence of earthly affection, and to consider himself, as he termed

it, above it. He was a man who deceived himself by this—people have that peculiar trait of character now and then, and place credence in their own impossibilities.

Mr. Gray was a lithographer by trade—a man who would have earned more money had not his preaching interfered with his work, and had he not been rather too particular for a business-man upon what work he engaged himself. A crotchety, irritable being, who brought his religion into his business, and, therefore, occasionally muddled both. On one occasion he had been horrified by the receipt of an order to lithograph several scenes from the last new pantomime, to be exhibited on broadsheets outside the theatres-doors, and in tobacconists' shops; and having declined to be an agent in such a "Works of the Beast," had been dismissed from the staff of a firm which he had faithfully served for many years. He had lived hard after that, known what it was to be penniless and fireless, and almost bootless, but those unpleasant sensations had their comforts for him—they were evidences of his sacrifice for his character's sake, and he had fought on doggedly till other employment came, which brought his head above water. He was a man who never gave way in his opinions, or sacrificed them for his personal convenience—a disagreeable man more often than not, but a man respected among his chapel-circle, and who, when once understood—that was not often, however—was generally liked. A man who dealt in hard truths, and had not invariably the gentlest method of distributing them; but a man who loved to see justice done to all oppressed, and did his best after his own way.

His first attempt to do justice, after Mattie's acquaintance with him, was in Mattie's favor. He understood all the reasons for Mattie's departure from Great Suffolk Street, and he saw where Mr. Wesden had been deceived, and in what manner he had been led by degrees to form a false estimate of Mattie's conduct.

He was a fidgety man, we have implied—more than that, he was an excitable and restless man.

"I must see that Mr. Wesden again—we must both see him, Mattie," he said one evening.

"Oh! I can never face him," said Mattie, in an alarmed manner, "after all that he has thought of me. I could not bear to ask him to confess that he was in the wrong, if he will not confess it of his own free-will."

"But he shall, my dear!"

"I can't explain the robberies—can't prove that I was innocent of all implication in them. I was a thief once, and he will never forget that."

"Won't he?" said Mr. Gray, decisively; "we'll see about that. I'll rouse him, my dear, depend upon it. The first opportunity I have, I'll call upon that man, and—rouse him."

"I hope not."

Mattie was at work at the fireside; she had taken to dress-making again, among a new connection of chapel-goers introduced by her father, and Mr. Gray was busy at his lithography. He was working hard into the night, doing extra work, in order that he might have all the next week free for a preaching expedition among the colliers, and he did not turn from his work to express his opinion; on the contrary, bent more earnestly over it.

"It's no good hoping, my dear, I have made

up my mind; he hasn't acted fairly by you—he hasn't made atonement; I must talk to him presently."

Mattie was glad of the postponement, and hopeful that her father, in his multiplicity of engagements, would forget his determination—a strange hope, for Mr. Gray never forgot any thing.

"What kind of man is this Mr. Wesden, Mattie?" he asked; "I have only seen him once, for a few minutes. Hard, isn't he?"

"Sometimes. He has altered very much lately."

"A worldly man—fond of money—grasping, in fact. Such a man is hard to impress. I'll have a try at him, though."

"He's a very good man, father," Mattie said; "you must remember that he saved me from the streets, and that for years and years was very good and kind to me."

"Yes, yes; I shall pay him back some day; but he must be worldly, I should think, and in return for all his goodness I'll make a good man of him—see if I don't! I suppose you used to open on Sundays in Great Suffolk Street?"

"Never."

"Hum—that's well. Not so bad as I thought. Did he go to chapel of a Sunday, now?"

"To church—St. George's."

"Hum—that's not so bad. Not much credit in making a better man of him," he muttered; "but I'll—rouse him!"

The next day he neglected his work on purpose to attempt the experiment. He was successful enough, for there was a rough eloquence inherent in him, and he had a fair cause to plead; and the result was, that the roused Mr. Wesden made his appearance arm in arm with Mr. Gray at Mattie's home.

"I've got him!" said Mr. Gray, triumphantly; "here's Mr. Wesden, Mattie. He has come to say how very sorry he was for all that parted you and him; haven't you, Sir?"

"Very sorry," said Mr. Wesden, looking at Mattie askance; "I've been thinking of it a long while—yes, Mattie, very sorry!"

He held out both hands to her, and Mattie ran to him, clasped them in her own, shook them heartily, and then burst out crying on his shoulder.

"Oh, my first father! I didn't think that you would believe wrong of me all your life!"

"No; and it was very wrong, Mattie. And all will be right now; you and your father must come and see us very often."

"Yes."

She turned to her father eagerly; but Mr. Gray was at his lithography, bending closely over his work, and apparently taking no heed of this reconciliation. He had done his share of duty, and so his interest had vanished.

"Father, you hear?"

"I don't care about much company; when we've nothing better to do than idle our time away, perhaps," was the far from suave reply to this.

"My daughter and yours are old friends, Mr. Gray," said Mr. Wesden, almost entreatingly.

"Mattie won't care about much company herself, and I very much doubt if—if that young person you allude to is exactly fitting for my daughter, whose character I am anxious to

model after my own ideas of what is truly womanly."

Mattie looked up at this; her father was strange in his manner that night, and he perplexed her.

"Am I not truly womanly now, Sir?" she asked, with a merry little laugh. She was in high spirits that night.

Mr. Gray softened.

"You are a very good girl, Mattie—a very good girl indeed; there are only a few little alterations necessary," he added, as though he was speaking of some marble statue whose corners he might round off with a chisel at his leisure.

"And you, Sir," said Mattie, turning to Mr. Wesden again, "don't think *any* harm of me now? The robberies—the talk with Mr. Hinchford—" she added, with a faint blush.

"What was that?" asked Mr. Gray, with renewed alacrity.

"Foolishness—all foolishness on my part," said Wesden; "how could I have acted so? And yet, when it came to being out all night, the fancies turned to truths, it seemed. Ah! no matter now."

"No matter now. Oh! I am very happy. Will you sit down here for a while, and tell me about Harriet and yourself—and *she* who was always so kind to me?"

"And thought well of you to the last. We wrangled once or twice about that—the only thing we ever had to quarrel about, Mattie, in all our lives together."

"Sit down and tell me about her—my true mother! You will excuse my father—he is very busy."

"Certainly."

And after his old dreamy stare at Mr. Gray, who appeared to have suddenly and entirely lost all interest in Mr. Wesden, he sat down by the fireside and talked of old times—the dear old times that Mattie loved to hear about. Mattie was happy that night; her heart was lighter; her character had been redeemed to him who had mistrusted her; he was sitting again by her side; all her love for him had come back as it were, and all his cruel thoughts of her had vanished away forever.

Mr. Wesden talked more than he used, when one particular subject was dilated on; and to have Mattie full of interest in that better half of him that had gone from life on earth to life eternal, gave brightness to his eyes, vigor to his narrative, and rendered him oblivious to time, till a deep voice behind him broke in upon the dialogue.

"It's getting late."

"Ah! it must be," said Mr. Wesden, rising. "And you'll come now, Mattie? You have forgiven me?"

"With all my heart—what there was to forgive!"

"And you'll let her come, Mr. Gray, now I have done her that justice?"

"When there's time."

Mr. Wesden departed; Mattie saw him down stairs to the passage door, and stood watching his figure, not so active as of yore, proceeding down the dimly lighted street. When she returned to the sitting-room, she found that her father had left his work, and was sitting with

his feet on the fender, rubbing the palms of his hands slowly together. He did not look round when she came in; when she had taken her seat near him, he did not look up at her. There was a change in him, which Mattie remarked, and after a little while inquired the reason for.

"Mattie," he said, suddenly, "I didn't know that you were so fond of Mr. Wesden, or I'd have never brought him here."

"Yes, I am fond of him—I am fond of all those who have been kind to me—who belong unto the past, of which he and I have been speaking to-night."

"You like him better than me?"

Mattie was too astonished to reply at once to this. She saw the reason for his sudden reserve to Mr. Wesden in a new light; she detected a new feature in him, that had heretofore been hidden. Years ago—like a far-away murmur—she could fancy that her mother spoke again of her husband's jealousy as one reason why home had been unhappy, and she had fled from it. Mr. Gray became excited. His eyes lit up, his face flushed a little, and his hands puckered up bits of cloth at his knees in a nervous, irritable way.

"I shouldn't like that man to be put ever before me in every thing—to be liked better than myself—he has got a daughter of his own to love, and must not rob me of you. I can't have it—I won't have it! My life has been a very desolate one till now, and it is your duty to make amends for it, and be faithful to me in the latter days."

"You may trust me, father."

She laid her hand on his, and he turned and looked into her dark eyes, where truth and honesty were shining. He brightened up at once.

"I think I may—you'll not forget me—you'll be like a daughter to me. Yes, I can trust you, Mattie!"

This fugitive cloud was wafted away on the instant; Mattie almost forgot the occurrence, and all was well again.

CHAPTER VII.

A DINNER PARTY.

MEANWHILE Sidney Hinchford had mapped his course out for the future; he had been ever fond of planning out his paths in life, as though no greater planner than he were near to thwart him. That they were turned from their course or broken short, at times, taught no lesson; he gave up his progress upon them, but he sketched at once the new course for his adoption, and began afresh his journey.

He had parted with Harriet Wesden forever; so be it—it belonged to the irreparable, and he must look it sternly in the face and live it down as best he might. It had been all a fallacy, and he the slave of a delusion; if, in the waking, he had suffered much, was in his heart still suffering, let him keep an unmoved front before the world, that should never guess at the keenness and bitterness of this disappointment. He had his duties to pursue; he had his father to deceive by his demeanor—he must not let the shadow of his distress darken the little light remaining for that old man, whom he loved so well, and

who looked upon him as the only one left to love or was worth living for.

He told his father that the engagement was at an end; that Harriet and he had both, by mutual consent, released each other from the contract, and considered it better to be friends—simply friends, who could esteem each other, and wish each other well in life. There had been no quarreling, he was anxious to impress on Mr. Hinchford; he had himself suggested the separation, feeling, in the first place, that Harriet Wesden was scarcely suited to be his wife; and in the second, that he had been selfish and unjust to bind her to an engagement extending over a period of years, with all uncertainty beyond.

The old gentleman scarcely comprehended the details; he understood the result, and as it did not appear to seriously affect his son, he could imagine that Sid had acted honorably and for the very best. He did not want Sid to marry, and perhaps live apart from him; he knew that much of his own happiness would vanish away at the altar, where Sid would take some one for better, for worse, and he could not regret in his heart any thing that retained his boy at his side. In that heart he had often thought that Harriet Wesden was scarcely fit for his son's wife, scarcely deserving of that dear boy. There was time enough for Sid to marry a dozen years hence; he had married late in life himself, and why should not his son follow his example?

Sidney Hinchford heard a little of this reasoning in his turn; but whether he admired his father's remarks or not did not appear from the unmoved aspect of his countenance. He was always anxious to turn the conversation into other channels; partial in those long evenings to backgammon with his father—a game which absorbed Mr. Hinchford's attention, and rendered him less loquacious. Still Sidney was a fair companion, and disguised the evidence of his disappointment well; he had set himself the task of making the latter days of that old gentleman free from care if possible, and he played his part well, and would have deceived keener eyes than his father's. That father was becoming weaker in body and mind, Sid could see; he was more feeble than his elder brother now—success in life had tested his nervous system more—possibly worn him out before his time. Like his son he had had ever a habit of keeping his chief troubles to himself, and preserving a fair front to society. He had had a nervous wife to study, afterward a son to encourage by his stanch demeanor. He had been an actor throughout the days of his tribulation, and such acting is the wear and tear of body and mind, and produces its natural fruit at a later season.

Sidney Hinchford saw the change in him, and knew that their parting must come, sooner than the father dreamed of. Mr. Hinchford had a knowledge of his own defects, but not of their extent. He was ignorant how weak he had become, as he seldom stirred from home now; and his memory, which played him traitor, also, helped him to forget its defects! He pictured Sidney and him together for many years yet—the Hinchfords were a long-lived race, and he did not dream of himself being an exception to the rule.

But Sidney noted every change, and became anxious. He noted also that the powers of mind seemed waning faster than the body, and that there were times when his father almost forgot their poor estate, and talked more like the rich man he had been once. He brought a doctor to see him once, sat him down by his father's side, in the light of an office friend, and then waited anxiously for the verdict delivered an hour afterward, in the passage.

"Keep him from all excitement if you can—let him have his own way as much as possible—and there is not a great deal to fear."

Sidney cautioned Ann Packet, who was partial to a way of her own, and then went to office more contented in mind. Over the office books he was sterner and graver than he used to be, and more inclined than ever to repel the advances of his cousin.

His salary had been raised by that time; he had distinguished himself as a good and faithful servant, and he took the wages that were due to him with thanks for his promotion.

One day his uncle sent for him into the inner chamber to speak of matters foreign to the business of a banking-house.

"Sidney, I have troubled you more than once with advice concerning my son Maurice."

"Yes."

"He is about to offer you and your father an invitation to dine with him next week."

"I know what to answer, Sir," said Sidney, somewhat stiffly. He objected to this advice—gratis principle, and thought that Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford might have left him to his own judgment.

"No, you don't, and that's why I sent for you. Maurice will be thirty-one next week—it's a little family affair, almost exclusively confined to members of the family, and I hope that you will both come."

"Sir—I—"

"By-gones are by-gones; we do not make a mere pretense of having forgotten the past—we Hinchfords," said his uncle. "Sidney, I will ask it as a favor?"

"Very well, Sir. But my father is not well, and I fear not able to bear any extra fatigue."

"I am not afraid of old Jemmy's consent," said the banker. "There, go to your desk, and don't waste valuable time in prolixity."

Late that day Maurice Hinchford addressed his cousin. Sidney was going down the bank steps homeward when his cousin followed him, and passed his arm through his.

"Sidney, you'll find two letters of mine at home. They are for you and your father. I shall call it deuced unkind to say No to their contents!"

"Suppose we say Yes, then!"

"Thank you. The governor and I want you and your governor down at our place next week. No excuses. Even Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford will not have them this time; that stern paterfamilias, who thinks familiarity with me will breed the usual contempt."

"For the business—not for you, Maurice."

"He's very anxious to make a model clerk of you, and very much afraid that I shall spoil you. As if I were so dangerous a friend, relative, or acquaintance! Upon my honor I can't make it out exactly. I've had an idea that I should be

just the friend for you. Perhaps the governor is coming round to my way of thinking at last."

Sidney repeated his past assertions that their positions did not and could never correspond. Maurice laughed at this as usual.

"Haven't I told you fifty times that I don't care a fig for position, and that a Hinchford is always a Hinchford—i. e., a gentleman? Sidney, you are an incomprehensibility; when you marry that lady to whose attractions you have confessed yourself susceptible perhaps I shall make you out more clearly."

Sidney's countenance changed a little—he became grave—and his cousin noticed the difference.

"Any thing wrong?" was the quick question here.

Sidney was annoyed that he had betrayed himself—he who prided himself upon mastering all emotion when the occasion was necessary.

"Oh no; every thing right, Maurice," he said, with a forced lightness of demeanor; "the folly of an engagement that could end in nothing, discovered in good time, and two romantic beings sobered for their good!"

"Why could it end in nothing? I don't see."

"Oh! it's a long story," replied Sidney, "and you would not feel interested in it. I was selfish to seek to bind her to a long engagement, and we both thought so, after mature deliberation. I turn off here; good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Sidney found the invitations awaiting him at home. Mr. Hinchford had opened his own letter, and spent the greater part of the afternoon in perusing and repersuing it.

"What—what do you think of this, Sid?"

"Tell me what you think of it."

"Well, I think, just for once, we might as well go—show them that we know how to behave ourselves, poor as we are, Sidney."

"Very well," said Sidney, somewhat wearily; "we'll go."

"Let me see; what have I done with that dress-coat of mine?" said the father. "How long is it since I wore it, I wonder?"

Twenty-five years, or thereabout, since Mr. Hinchford had worn a dress-coat, consequently a little behind the fashion just then. Sidney Hinchford thought, with a sigh, of the fresh expenses incurred by the acceptance of his cousin's invitation, he who was saving money for the rainy days ahead of him. How long ahead now, he thought, were the years still to intervene and leave him in God's sunlight? He could not tell; but there was a cruel doubt which kept him restless. Give him his sight while his father lived, at least, and spare the white head further care in this life! Afterward, when he was alone, he thought, a little misanthropically, it did not matter. His own trouble he could bear, and there would be no one else—no one in all the world!—to grieve about him. A few expressions of commonplace condolence for his affliction, and then—forever alone!

Sidney Hinchford and his father went down by railway to Redhill. The dinner-party was for five p.m.—an early hour, to admit of London friends return by the eleven o'clock train. At the station Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford's carriage waited for father and son, and whirled them away to the family mansion, while the

less favored, who had arrived by the same train, sought hired conveyances.

"He treats us well—just as we deserve to be treated—just as I would have treated him, Sid. He was always a good sort—old Jeff!"

Sidney did not take heed of his father's change of opinion; the world had been full of changes, and here was nothing to astonish him. He was prepared for any thing remarkable now, he thought; he could believe in any transformations.

Father and son reached their relative's mansion exactly as the clock in the turret roof of the stable-house was striking five; there were carriages winding their way down the avenue before them; the hired flys, with their hungry occupants, were bringing up the rear. Sid looked from the carriage window, and almost repented that he had brought his father to the festivities. But Mr. Hinchford was cool and self-possessed; it was a return to the old life, and he seemed brighter and better for the change.

Maurice Hinchford received them in the hall: the first face in the large ante-room was that of Uncle Geoffry. There was no doubt of the genuineness of their reception—it was an honest and a hearty welcome.

Sidney had mixed but little in society; few young men at his age had seen less of men and manners, yet few men, old or young, could have been more composed and stately. He was not anxious to look his best, or fearful of betraying his want of knowledge; he had graver thoughts at his heart, and being indifferent as to the effect he produced, was cool and unmoved by the crowd of guests into which he had been suddenly thrust. He had accepted that invitation to oblige his cousin, not himself; and there he was, by his father's side, for Maurice's guests to think the best or worst of him—which they pleased, he cared not.

Poor Sid at this time was inclined to be misanthropical; he looked at all things through a distorting medium, and he had lost his natural lightness of heart. His lip curled at the staidness and frigidity of his uncle's guests, and he was disposed to see a stand-offishness in some of them which did not exist, and was only the natural ante-dinner iciness that pervades a conglomeration of diners-out, unknown to each other. Still it steeled Sidney somewhat; he was the poor relation, he fancied, and some of these starchy beings scented his poverty by instinct! Maurice introduced him to his mother and sisters—people with whom we shall have little to do, and therefore need not dilate upon. The greeting was a little stiff from the maternal quarter—Sidney remembered on the instant his father's previous verdicts on the brother's wife—cordial and cousinly enough from the sisters, two pretty girls, the junior of Maurice, and three buxom ladies, the senior of their brother—two married, with Maurices of their own.

Sidney endeavored to act his best; he had not come there to look disagreeable, though he felt so in the first early moments of meeting. When the signal was given to pass into the dining-room he offered his arm to his youngest cousin, at Maurice's suggestion, and thawed a little at her frankness, and at the brightness of her happy-looking face.

There might have been one little pang at the

evidence of wealth and position which that dining-room afforded him—for he was a Hinchford also, and his father had been a rich man in past days; but the feeling was evanescent, if it existed, and after one glance at his father, as cool and collected as himself, he devoted himself to the cousin, whom he had met for the first time in his life.

A grand dinner-party, given in grand style, as befitted a man well to do in the world. No gardeners and stable-men turned into waiters for the nonce, and still unmistakably gardeners and stable-men for all their limp white neck-cloths—no hired waiters from remote quarters of the world, and looking more like undertaker's men than lackeys—no flustered maid-servants and nursery-maids, pressed into the service, and suffering from nervous trepidation—this array of footmen at the back, the staff always on hand in that palatial residence, which a lucky turn of the wheel had reared for Geoffrey Hinchford.

Sidney's cousin sang the praises of her brother all dinner-time; what a good-tempered, good-hearted fellow he was, and how universally liked by all with whom he came in contact. She was anxious to know what Sidney thought of him, and whether he had been impressed by Maurice's demeanor; and Sidney sang in a minor key to the praises of his cousin also, not forgetting in his peculiar pride to regret that difference of position which set Maurice apart from him.

Miss Hinchford did not see that, and was sure that Maurice would scoff at the idea; she was sure, also, that every one would be glad to see Sidney at their house as often as he liked to call there. Sidney thawed more and more; a naturally good-tempered man, with a pleasant companion at his side, it was not in his power to preserve a gloomy aspect. He became conversational and agreeable; he had only one care, and that was concerning his father, to whom he glanced now and then, and whom he always found looking the high-bred gentleman, perfectly at his ease, and very different to the old man, whose mental infirmities had kept him anxious lately. Mr. James Hinchford had gone back to a past in which he had been ever at home; his pliant memory had abjured all the long interim of poverty, lodgings in Great Suffolk Street, and a post at a builder's desk; he remembered nothing of them that night, and was the old Hinchford that his brother had known. To the amazement of his son, he rose after dinner to propose the toast of the evening—somewhat out of place, being a relation and yet a stranger almost—and spoke at length, and with a fluency and volubility which Sidney had not remarked before. He assumed his right to propose the toast as the oldest friend of the family, and he did it well and gracefully enough, utterly confounding the family physician, who had been two days compiling a long and elaborate speech which "that white-headed gentleman opposite" had taken completely out of his mouth.

That white-headed gentleman sat down amidst hearty plaudits, and Maurice's health was drunk with due honors; and then Maurice—"dear old Morry!" as his sister impetuously exclaimed—responded to the toast.

A long speech in his turn, delivered with much

energy and rapidity, his flushed and good-looking face turning to right and left of that long array of guests around him. Sidney's heart thrilled to hear one expression of Maurice's—an allusion to the gentleman who had proposed his health, "his dear uncle, whose presence there tended so much to the pleasurable feelings of that night."

"Well, he is a good fellow," said Sidney, heartily; "I wish I had a brother like him to stand by me in life."

His cousin looked her gratitude at him for the outburst, and no one hammered the table more lustily than Sidney at the conclusion of his cousin's speech.

There were a few more toasts before the ladies retired at the signal given by the hostess; there was a rustle of silk and muslin through the broad doorway, and then the gentlemen left to themselves, and many of them breathing freer in consequence.

There remained some twenty or twenty-five gentlemen to do honor to the wine which shone from the array of decanters on the table; Sidney drew his chair closer to his neighbors, and looked round him again. His father, perfectly at home—happy and equable—sparing with the wine, too, as Sidney had wished, and yet had not thought filial to hint to his sire. His father almost faced him, and Sidney, whose powerful glasses brought him within range of vision, could return the smile bestowed in his direction now and then. The old man, who had forgotten his poverty, kept in remembrance the son who had shared that poverty with him.

There was more speech-making after the ladies had retired; deeper drinking, and a wider scope of subjects. One gentleman near his father, in a lackadaisical strain, rose to propose the health of the family physician, who had been balked of his speech early in the evening; and Sidney, startled somewhat by the tone of a voice that he fancied he had heard before, peered through his glasses, and tried to make the speaker out.

He had seen that man before, or heard that strange drawl—where or in what company he was at fault—the man's features were indistinct at that distance. He edged his chair nearer—even in his intense curiosity, for which he was scarcely able to account, changed his place, and went a few seats from the foot of the table, where Maurice was now sitting in his mother's vacated place.

Then Sidney recognized the man—suddenly and swiftly the truth darted upon him—he had met that man in the Borough; he had stood between him and his offensive persecution of Harriet Wesden; he was the "prowler" of old days—the man from whom he had extorted an apology in the public streets, and from whom a generous and unwashed public would accept no apology.

The old antagonism seemed to revive on the instant; he felt the man's presence there an insult to himself; his blood warmed, and his ears tingled; he wondered what reason had brought that man there, and whose friend he could possibly be?

"What man is that?" he asked, almost imperiously of Maurice, who, taken aback by the question, stared at Sidney with amazement.

"A friend of mine," he answered at last; "do you know him?"

"N-no."

Sidney relapsed into silence and mastered his excitement. This was not a time or place to mention how he had met that man, or in what questionable pursuit; there was danger to Maurice, from so evil an acquaintance; and in his own honesty of purpose, Sid could not understand that the man had any right at that table, an honored guest there. He knew but little of polite society; did not understand that polite society requires no reference as to the morals of its guests, and is quite satisfied if the name be good, and the status unquestionable. Polite society can not trouble itself about the morals of its male members.

Sidney sat and watched the prowler, and, in his confusion, drank more port-wine than was perhaps good for him. He fancied that his cousin Maurice had implied a rebuke for his harsh interrogative; and he was considering that, too, in his mind, and wishing, for the first time, that he had not presented himself at his cousin's dinner-table.

The toast was drunk and responded to by the family physician, who very ingeniously dovetailed the remarks upon Maurice's natal day into his own expression of thanks for the honor accorded him. Sidney omitted to drink the stranger's health, and made no attempt to applaud the fine words by which it had been succeeded. He sat discomfited by the prowler's presence there—but for that man he might never have been engaged to Harriet Wesden, and, therefore, have never experienced the disappointment—the cruel reaction—which had followed the folly of that betrothal.

"Sid," called his father across the table at him, "aren't you well, lad?"

"Oh! very well," was the reply; "what is there to ail me in such pleasant company?"

"Perhaps the gentleman is sighing for lady's society; if he will move an adjournment I'll second the motion," said the prowler, suave and bland, totally forgetful of that dark face which had glowered at him once in London streets.

"I shall propose nothing," said Sid, curtly.

Those who heard the uncivil reply looked toward the speaker somewhat curiously. When the wine's in the wit's out; had Sidney Hinchford drowned his courtesies in his uncle's decanters? The prowler—he is a fugitive character, whose name we need not parade at this late stage to our readers—stared at our hero with the rest, but was not affected by it, or understood good-breeding sufficiently well to disguise all evidence at his friend's table. He turned to Maurice with a laugh.

"Hinchford, old fellow, I leave the proposition in your hands. You who were always a lady's man."

"Not I."

"But I say you were—I say that you are. Do you think that I have forgotten all the *aventures amoureuses* of Maurice Darcy, I, his sworn brother-in-arms, his pupil?"

"Steady, Frank, steady!" cried Maurice.

But the guests were noisy, and the subject was a pleasant one to gentlemen over their wine, with the door closed on skirts and flounces. There were shouts of laughter at the prowler's charge;

Maurice shook his head, blushed and laughed, but appeared rather to like the accusation than otherwise; Maurice's father, at home and at his ease, laughed with the rest. "A young dog—a young scape-grace!" he chuckled. Even Sidney's father laughed also; young men will be young men, he thought, and the prowler was pleasant company, and made the time fly. It is this after-dinner talk, when the ladies have retired, and the bottle is not allowed to stand still, which pleases diners-out the most. This is the "fun of the fair," where the Merry-Andrew deals forth his jokes, and the wine-bibber appreciates the double-entendre all the more for the singing in his ears and the thick mist by which he is surrounded.

"Do you think that I have forgotten the stationer's daughter? By George! that was a leaf from romance and virtuous indignation in the ascendant. Tell us the story, Maurice; we are all friends here: and though the joke's against you—"

"Gentlemen, I propose that we join the ladies," said Maurice, rising, with some confusion.

The guests laughed again noisily at this; it was so palpable an attempt to retreat that the dining-room rang again with peals of laughter. Sidney Hinchford, sterner and grimmer than ever, alone sat unmoved, until Maurice had dropped into his seat in despair, and then he rose and looked across at his father.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Certainly, Sid, quite ready."

"Oh, the ladies have a hundred topics to dwell upon over their coffee, Sidney," said his uncle: "we must have no rebellion this side of the house."

"I am going home, Sir; you must excuse me; I can not stay here any longer. Come, father!"

"Home!"

"I have business at home; I am pressed for time; I will not stay!" he almost shouted.

Sidney's father, in mild bewilderment, rose and tottered after him. This was an unpleasant wind-up to a social evening, and Sid's strange demeanor perplexed him. But the boy's will was law, and he succumbed to it; the boy always knew what was best—his son, Sid, was never at fault—never.

The guests were too amazed to comprehend the movement; some of them were inclined to consider it a joke of Sid's, an excuse to retreat to the drawing-room; the mystery was too much for their wine-numbed faculties just then.

Sidney and his father were in the broad marble-paved hall; the footmen lingering about there noted their presence—one made a skip toward the drawing-room facing them.

"Stop!" said Sid. His memory was good, and his organ of locality better. He walked with a steady step toward a small room at the end of the hall—a withdrawing room, where the hats and coats had been placed early in the evening. He returned in a few moments with his great-coat on, his father's coat across his arm, and two hats in his hands.

"Then—then we're really going, Sid?"

"I'm sick of this life, it is not fit for us. Why did we come?" he asked, angrily, as he assisted his perplexed father into his great-coat.

"I—I don't know, Sid," stammered the father. "I thought that we were spending quite

a pleasant evening. Has any one said any thing?"

"Let us be off!"

Maurice Hinchford came from the dining-room toward them with a quick step. There was excitement, even an evidence of concern upon his handsome face.

"Sidney," he said, holding out his hand toward him, "I understand all this; I can explain all this at a more befitting time. Don't go now—it looks bad. It isn't quite fair to us or yourself."

"You are Maurice Darcy!" said Sid, sternly.

"It was a fool's trick, of which I have heartily repented. It—"

"You were the man who deliberately sought the ruin of an innocent girl to whom I was engaged—you sought my disgrace and hers, and you ask me to your house, and insult me through your friends thus shamelessly. You make a jest—"

"On my honor, no, Sir!"

"No matter—I see to whom I have been indebted; perhaps the motive which led to past preferment—I am ashamed and mortified—I have done with you and yours forever. I would curse the folly that led me hither to-night were it not for the light in which it has placed my enemies!"

"You are rash, Sidney. To-morrow you will think better of me."

"When my cooler judgment steps in and shows me what I must sacrifice for my position—*my place*," he replied. "Sir, you are a Hinchford—you should know that we are a proud family by this time. I say that we have done with you. Judge me at your worst—as I judge you!—if I fail to keep my word."

He passed his arm through his father's, and led the bewildered old man down the steps into the night air; he had been insulted, he thought, and thus, spurning appearances, he had resented it. He could not play longer his part of guest in that house; his old straightforward habits led him at once to show his resentment and retire. So he shook the dust of the house from his feet, and turned his back upon his patrons.

CHAPTER VIII.

MATTIE'S CONFESSION.

SIDNEY HINCHFORD kept his word. He returned not to service in his uncle's bank. He gave up his chances of distinction in that quarter rather than be indebted to a villain, as he considered his cousin to be, for his success in life. It was an exaggeration of virtuous indignation, perhaps, but it was like Sidney Hinchford. He considered his cousin as the main cause of his separation from Harriet Wesden. That man had met her after the little Brighton romance, of which faint inkings had been communicated to Sid by Harriet herself, and had played the lover too well—speciously coaxing her from that which was true unto that which was false and dangerous, and from which her own defense had but saved her. Evidently a deep, designing man, who had sought the ruin of the woman Sidney had loved best in the world—Sid could not hold service under him now the mask had dropped.

"Father, I shall leave our rich relations to themselves," he had said, the next morning. "I am not afraid of obtaining work in other quarters. I have done with them."

"You know best, Sid," said the father, with a sigh.

"I'll tell you the story—it is no secret now. You shall tell me how you would have acted in my place."

Sid related the particulars of his love-engagement to his father—why it had been broken off, and by whose means, and Mr. Hinchford listened attentively, and exclaimed, when the narrative was ended,

"That nephew was a scamp of the first water, and we are well rid of him."

"I am not afraid of getting other employment," said Sidney, unremindful of his past attempts. "If I were, I think I would prefer starving to service in that bank."

"Both of us would," added Mr. Hinchford.

Sidney thought of his father, and went out again in the old search for a place. It was beginning life again; he was once more at the bottom of the hill, and all the past labor was to be begun afresh. No matter, he did not despair; he was young and strong yet; he had saved money; upward of a hundred pounds were put by for the rainy day, and he could afford to wait a while; if fortune went against him at this new outset, his was not a nature to flinch at the first obstacle. He had always fought his way.

But luck went with him, as it seemed to Sidney. That day he heard of the starting of a new bank on the limited liability principle, and he sought out the manager, stated his antecedents, offered his services, and was engaged. He came home rejoicing to his father with the news, and after all had been communicated his father tendered him a letter that had been awaiting his arrival.

Sidney looked at the letter; in the left corner of the envelope was written "Maurice Hinchford," and Sid's first impulse was to drop it quietly in the fire, and pay no heed to its contents. But he changed his mind, broke the seal, and read, in a few hasty lines, Maurice's desire for an interview with his cousin. Maurice confessed to being the Darcy of that past evil story, and expressed a wish to enter into a little explanation of his conduct, weak and erring as it was, but not so black as Sidney might imagine. Sidney tore up the letter and penned his reply—unyielding and unforgiving. He could find no valid excuse for his cousin's conduct; he was sure there was not any, and he saw no reason why they two should ever meet again. This, the substance of Sidney Hinchford's reply, which was dispatched, and then the curtain fell between these two young men, and Sidney alone in the world, more grim, more business-like, even more misanthropical than ever.

He had soon commenced work in the new bank. Before its start in the world with the usual flourish of trumpets, he had found himself taken into confidence, and his advice on matters monetary and commercial followed on more than one occasion; he was, in his heart, sanguine of success in this undertaking; he saw the road to his own honorable advancement; his employers had been pleased with the character which they had received from Messrs. Hinchford and Son,

bankers, to whom Sidney had referred them, with a little reluctance; before him all might yet be bright enough.

Then came the check to his aspirations—the check which he had feared, which he had seen advancing to rob him of the one tie that had bound him to home. His father gave way more in body if not in mind, and became very feeble in his gait; he had reached the end of his journey, and was tired, dispirited, and broken down. He gave up, and took to his bed. Sidney, returning one day from office, found him in his own room, a poor, weak, trembling old man, set apart forever from the toil and wear of daily life.

His mind seemed brighter in those latter days, to have cleared for a while before the darkness set in.

"Sidney," he said, reaching out his thin hand to his son as he entered, "you must not mind my giving up. I have been trying hard to keep strong for your sake, but the effort has tired me out, boy."

"Courage! I shall see you hale and hearty yet."

"No, Sid, it's a break up forever. What a miserable, selfish old fellow I have been all my life! You will get on better in the world without me—only yourself to think of and care for then."

"Only myself!" echoed Sidney, gloomily.

The poor old gentleman would have offered more of this sort of consolation had not Sidney stopped him. It was a cruel philosophy, against which the son's heart protested. Sid was a man to attempt consolation, but not capable of receiving it. His austerity had placed him, as he thought, beyond it, and his father's efforts only stabbed him more keenly to the quick.

Sidney tried to believe that his father's deliberate preparation was a whim occasioned by some passing weakness, but the truth forced its way despite him, sat down before him, haunted his dreams, would not be thought away. The doctor gave no hopes; the physician whom he called in only confirmed the doctor's verdict; it was a truth from which there was no escape.

When he gave up reasoning against his own convictions, Sidney gave up his clerkship, as suddenly, and with as little warning as he had vacated his stool in his uncle's counting-house.

There was a choice to make between hard work day and night at the new banking scheme—isolated completely from his dying father—and attendance, close and unremitting, to that father who had loved him truly and well, and Sidney did not hesitate.

"Afterward, I can think of myself," he said; "let me brighten the days that are left you, to the best of my power."

"Ah! but the future?" said the father, anxious concerning his son's position in life.

"I do not care for it, or my position in it now."

"Don't say that, Sid."

"Father, I was working for you, and for your comfort in the future—now let all thoughts of the world go away for a while, and leave you and me together—thus!"

He laid his hand upon the father's, which clutched his nervously.

"Oh! but what is to become of you?"

"Do you fear my getting on, with the long years before me wherein I can work?"

"No, you are sure to rise, Sid."

Sidney did not answer.

"Unless you grow despondent at the difficulties in the way, or let some secret trouble weigh you down. Sid, my dear son, there's nothing on your mind?"

"Oh no!—nothing. Don't think that," was the quick response—the white lie, for which Sidney Hinchford deserved forgiveness. He would keep his sorrows to himself, and not distress that death-bed by his own vain complainings against any affliction in store for him!

When the father grew weaker he expressed a wish to see his brother Geoffry again.

"We don't bear each other any malice—Geoffry and I, now. If you don't mind, Sid," he said, wistfully, "I should like to shake hands with him, and bid him good-by."

"I will write at once, Sir."

Sidney dispatched his letter, and the rich banker came in his carriage to the humble dwelling-place of his younger brother. Sidney did not see his uncle; he bore him no malice; he was even grateful to him for past kindnesses, but he could not face him in his bitter grief, and listen, perhaps, to explanations which he cared nothing for in that hour. With this new care staring him in the face, the other seemed to fade away, and with it much of his past bitterness of spirit. Leave him to himself, and trouble him no more!

When the interview was over, and his uncle was gone, Sidney returned to his post by his father's bedside.

"He has been talking about you, Sid," said the father; "he seemed anxious to see you."

"I am not fit for company."

"Maurice is abroad, he tells me."

"Indeed!"

Sidney changed the subject, read to his father, talked to him of the old days when the mother and wife were living—a subject on which Mr. Hinchford loved to dilate just then. But in the long, restless nights, when Sidney slept in the arm-chair by the fire-place—he left not his father day or night, and would have no hired watcher—the father, who had feigned sleep for his son's sake, lay and thought of the son's future, and was perplexed about it. His perceptive faculties had become wondrously acute, and he could see that Sidney Hinchford was unhappy—had been unhappy before the illness which had cast its shadow in that little household. There was something wrong; something which he should never know, he felt assured. Who could help him?—who could assist him to discover it?—who would think of Sid in the desolation which was to be that boy's legacy, and do his or her best for him?

Early the next morning, when he was very weak, he said:

"I wonder the Wesdens haven't been to see me."

"I thought they would weary you. They are scarcely friends of ours now. I have not told them that you are ill. If you wish—"

"No, no, and they would weary you too, my boy, and things have altered very much between you. Sidney, you are sorry that they have altered, perhaps?"

"No—glad—very glad!"

"I should like to see Mattie," he said, after a pause; "why does *she* keep away?"

"I thought that she might disturb you, Sir," was the reply; "we are better by ourselves, and without our friend's sympathy. We are above it."

"Why, Sid, that's pride!"

"Call it precaution, Sir, or jealousy of any one taking my place between you and me, old staunch friends as we are."

His father said no more upon the question; he had been ever influenced by his son, and borne down by his strong will. He thought now that it was better to see no one but Sid, and the good clergyman who called every day—better for all! Sid knew best; he had always known best through life.

But later that day Sidney altered his mind. He had been sitting in the arm-chair apart from his father, revolving many things in that mind, and maintaining a silence which his father even began to think was strange—he whose thoughts were few and far between now—when he said, suddenly, to Ann Packet, who was entering on tip-toe with a candle:

"Ann, fetch Mattie here at once."

"Mattie, Master Sidney?—to be sure I will," she added, with alacrity; "I've been thinking about that, oh! ever so long."

"Be quick! don't stop! Leave a message if she's away. Here's the money; hire a cab there and back. Take the key with you, and let yourself in."

"What's that for, Sid?" asked the father.

"I think she should be here—I think all should be here who have ever known you, and whom you have expressed a wish to see. I am selfish and cruel."

"Oh ho! we don't believe that, boy," said the father; "we know better—oh! much better than that."

"Why shouldn't the Wesdens come? They are old friends; they were kind to you and me in the old days."

"Yes, very kind. You're quite right, Sid. But if they trouble you in the least, Sid, keep them away. I don't care about seeing any body very much now."

"Father, you are worse," said Sidney, leaping to his feet.

"No, boy—better. A spasm or two through here," laying his hand upon his chest, "which will go off presently."

"That's well."

Sidney sat down again in his old place, muttering, "I wish she would come," and the father lay quiet and thoughtful in his bed once more.

Presently the father went off to sleep, and Sidney sat and listened, with his face turned toward the bed all the long, long time, until the cab containing Ann Packet and Mattie drew up before the house.

They entered the house and came up stairs together, Mattie and Ann. Sid made no effort to stop them, though his father was in a restless sleep, from which a step would waken him; he still sat there, gloomy and apathetic. They entered the room, and Mr. Hinchford woke up at the opening of the door.

"Where's Sid?" he called.

"Here," said the son; "and here's Mattie, the old friend, adviser, comforter, at last!"

"Oh! why haven't I been told this before? Why have you all kept me so long in the dark?" said Mattie. "Oh, my dear old friend! my first kind friend of all of them!" she cried, turning to the sick-bed where Mr. Hinchford was watching her.

"Tell him, Mattie, that I shall not be entirely alone or friendless when the parting comes," said Sidney; "it troubles him; I see it. Ann, don't go—one minute."

He crossed to her, laid his hand upon her arm, and went out whispering to her, leaving Mattie and Mr. Hinchford in the room together.

"Don't let him go away; the boy mustn't leave me now," he said, in a terrified whisper. "Mattie, I'm worse. I have been keeping it back from the boy till the last, but I'm awfully worse."

Mattie glanced at him, and then ran to the door and called Sidney.

"I am coming back," said he, in reply; "speak to him, Mattie, for a while. I am wanted here."

Mattie returned to the bedside.

"He is wanted down stairs, he says."

"Ah! don't call him up, then, Mattie; some one has heard of his cleverness, and come after him to secure him. Well, it will be a distraction to him—when—I'm gone."

"And you so ill, and I to be kept in the dark!" said Mattie, dropping into the chair at the bed's head, and looking anxiously into the haggard face.

"I have been thinking of you, Mattie," he said, in a low voice; "thinking that you might be—of use—to him in the future."

Mattie shook her head sadly.

"Why not?" was his eager question.

"He is strong, and young, and knows the world better than I. How could I ever be of use to him?"

"He is weak—low-spirited—not like his old self now—never again, perhaps, like his old self. Mattie, I—seem—to think so!"

"Courage, dear friend. He will be always strong; his is not a weak nature."

"Mattie, I think he should have married Harriet Wesden after all," said he; "he loved her very dearly. She loved him, and understood how good and honorable he was at last. What separated them? I—I forget."

And he passed his hand over his forehead in the old vacant way.

"No matter now, perhaps. They are parted—perhaps only for a time. I have hoped so more than once."

"You have? You who guess—at the truth—so well. Why, Mattie, I—have hope, then, too—that it will not be—always dark like this."

"That's not likely."

"And if the chance comes—to bring those two together—you will do it? Oh, Mattie! you promise this—for me?"

"I promise."

"But," with a new fear visible on his face, "you will lose sight of him before the chance—of happiness—comes to the boy. You, ever apart from him—may not know—"

"Yes, I shall know—always!"

"He always stood your friend, remember, Mattie," said the old man, as if endeavoring to

win over Mattie heart and soul to the new cause by all the force of reasoning left in him. "He wasn't like—me and Wesden—ever inclined to waver in his thoughts of you. He believed—in you ever—to be good and true—and you will think of this?"

"I will," was the faint reply.

Mattie had bowed her head, and it was almost hidden in the bed-clothes. The old man's hand rested for an instant on the girl's raven hair.

"I have—a hope—that from you, and through your means, Sid—poor old Sid!—may find peace and comfort at last. I was thinking—of your liking for us all—this very night."

"Were you? It was kind to think of me," with a low murmur.

"And I—somehow—built my hopes in you. Do you remember how you—and I—used to talk of Sid—in that old room, in Suffolk—Street?"

"Well."

"Keep me in his memory; when he's very sad, remind him—of me—and how I loved him, Mattie," in a low, excited whisper. "I'm sure that he's in trouble—that he keeps something—back from—me!"

"A fancy, perhaps. What should he hide from you?"

"I can not tell; it may be fancy; but it—it worries me to think of. Oh, Mattie! you'll forget him if that trouble—should come to him! You'll forget—all this—and turn to that new father of yours! And I had hope in you."

"Hope in me ever. I will not betray your trust in me. Before all—myself, father, friends—your son!"

"Mattie!"

The father looked with a new surprise at our heroine. He had grown very weak, but her hasty, impetuous voice, seemed for an instant to give new life unto him.

"Hush! don't betray me. Never to living soul before have I dared to tell, to breathe this! God forgive me if I have failed to break away from all my folly, and have thought of him too much, as I, a stray from the streets, had never a right to think of one so well-born, honorable, and true. You forgive me—you, his father?"

"Yes."

"You know all now. How, without one ambitious thought of linking his name with mine, I will love him ever, and be ever, if he need it, his true friend and sister. I will die for him, when the time comes, and the secret will die

with me, and not shame us both. Judge me, if I am likely to forget him, Sir."

"No—no—I see all now."

"Don't mistake me; don't think at the last that I would scheme for him, or ever marry him, to disgrace a family like yours. Don't think any thing but that I love Harriet Wesden, also, before myself, but not before him, though I have tried so hard to live him down; and that I will do my best—always my very best—to bring about the happiness of both of them!"

"And there—may—be only one way, Mattie."

"Only one way, I hope."

"I trust you—God bless you!—you were always a good girl. Call the boy—my poor boy, Sid!"

Mattie did as requested. At a slow, almost painfully slow pace, Sidney re-entered, his hand still on Ann Packet's arm.

"Sid—I—I think I'll say good-by, now!"

Sidney sprang forward and caught his hands.

"Not yet—not good-by yet, Sir!"

"Why not? I don't fear to say it, Sid—I'm strong at heart—still; it's a brave—a brave parting! No regrets—no sense of duty—neglected! A kind father, I hope—a—a good son—I know! God bless you, boy!—peace and happiness to yours—in life. Mattie—think of him!"

Mattie bowed her head, and covered her face with her hands.

"Sidney—help her, too—if she's in trouble—ever an old friend."

"A true one!"

"True as steel; I know it. Good-by, Sid; keep strong for—the—old—father's sake. Will—you?"

"Yes."

"That's well!"

Sid bent over him and kissed him—kissed the calm face, so awfully calm and still now!—and then turned to Mattie.

"Take me away, Mattie. I can bear no more now. He was spared one trouble, thank God! In all his life he never guessed the end of this."

Mattie turned round, with a new fear possessing her.

"Sidney—Mr. Sidney!"

"Here—Mattie," he said, stretching forth his hand, and grasping, as it were, furtively for hers.

"I shall need friends now to help me."

"Not—oh! my God, not blind?"

"I have been blind all day!"

BOOK VI

SIDNEY'S FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

MATTIE'S CHOICE.

THERE are epochs in some lives when the heart cracks or hardens. When humanity, wrung to its utmost, gives way or ossifies. Both are dangerous crises, and require more than ordinary care; the physician must be skillful and understand human nature, or his efforts at cure will only kill the patient who submits to his remedies.

Man—we speak literally of the masculine gender at this point—though born unto trouble, finds it hard to support in a philosophical way. A great trouble that, in nine cases out of ten, shows woman at her best transforms man to his worst; if he be a man of the world, worldly, he is dethroned by the calamity which has fallen upon him. It is incomprehensible why *he* should suffer, he of all men, and he wraps himself in his egotism, his wounded self-love, and thinks of the injustice and hardness that have shut him out from his labors.

Such men, heavily oppressed, do not give in to the axiom, that it is well for them to be afflicted; they will not bow to God's will, or resign themselves to it; their outward calmness is assumed, and they chafe at the Great Hand which has arrested them midway. Such men will turn misanthropes and atheists, at times.

Sidney Hinchford after all was a man of the world. In the world he had lived and fought upward. There had been a charm in making his way in it, and the obstacles ahead had but nerved his arm to resist and his heart to endure. He had talents for success in the commercial world—even a genius for making money. With time before him, possibly Sidney Hinchford would have risen to greatness.

To make money—and to keep it when made—requires as much genius as to make poetry, rather more, perhaps. A genius of a different order, but a very fine one notwithstanding, and one which we can admire at a distance—on the curb-stones with our manuscripts under our arms, waiting for the genius's carriage to pass before we cross to our publishers'. Is not that man a genius who in these latter days rises to wealth by his own exertions, in lieu of having wealth thrust upon him? A genius, with wondrous powers of discrimination, not to be led into a bad thing, but seeing before other people the advantages to accrue from a good one, and making his investments accordingly. A man who peers into the future and beholds his own advancement, not the step before him but the apex in the clouds, lost to less keen-sighted folk fighting away at the base—therefore, a wonderful man.

We believe that Sidney Hinchford, like his uncle before him, would have risen in the world; he believed it also, and throughout his past ca-

reer—though we have seen him anxious—he never lost his hope of ultimate success. When he knew that there must come a period of tribulation and darkness for him, he had trusted to have time left him for position, and not till time was denied him, and the darkness set in suddenly, did he give up the battle. And then he did not give way; he hardened.

Sidney had never been a religious man, therefore he sought no consolation in his affliction, and believed not in the power of religion to console. He had been pure-minded, honorable, earnest, every thing that makes the good worldly man, but he had never been grateful to God for his endowments, and he bore God's affliction badly in consequence. He felt balked in his endeavor to prosper, therefore, aggrieved, and the darkness that had stolen over his senses seemed to find its way to his heart and transform him.

The clergyman, who had attended his father, attempted consolation with him, but he would have "none of it." He did not complain, he said; he had faced the worst—it was with him, and there was an end of it. Do not weary him with trite Bible-texts, but leave him to himself.

And by himself he sat down to brood over the inevitable wrong that had been done him; he, in the vigor of life and thought, shut apart from action! Once he had looked forward to a consolation even in distress, but that was to have been a long day hence. Now this day had been shortened, and the consolation was denied him. He knew that *that* was lost, and he had thought of a fight with the world to benumb the thoughts of the future; and then the world was shut away from him also, and he was broken down, inactive, and lost.

He and his uncle were the only attendants at the funeral; he was informed afterward that Mattie had stood at the grave's edge, and seen the last of her old friend and first patron; then his uncle had left him, failing in all efforts to console him. Geoffrey Hinchford offered his nephew money, all the influence at his disposal in any way or shape, but Sidney declined all coldly. He did not require help yet a while, he had saved money; he preferred being left to himself in that desolate home; presently, when he had grown reconciled to these changes, he should find courage to think what was best; meanwhile, those who loved him—he even told Mattie that—would leave him to himself.

Mattie made no effort to intrude upon him in the early days following the double loss; she was perplexed as to her future course, her method of fulfilling that promise made to Sidney's father on his death-bed. Her common sense assured her that in the first moments of sorrow, intrusion would be not only unavailing, but irritating—and her belief in becoming of service to Sidney was but a small one at the best. In the good, far-away time she might be an humble agent in

bringing Harriet Wesden and him together; Harriet who must love him out of very pity now, and forget that wounded pride which had followed the annulment of engagement.

Meanwhile, she remained quiet and watchful; busy at her dress-making, busy in her father's home, attentive to that new father whom she had found, and who was very kind to her, though he scarcely seemed to understand her. Still, they agreed well together, for Mattie was submissive, and Mr. Gray had more than a fair share of his own way; and he was a man who liked his own way, and with whom it agreed vastly. But we have seen that he was a jealous man, and that Mattie's interest in Mr. Wesden had discomfited him. He was a good man, we know, but jealousy got the upper hand of him at times, when he was scarcely aware of it himself, for he attributed his excitement, perhaps his envy, to very different feelings. He was even jealous of a local preacher of his own denomination, a man who had made a convert of a most vicious article—an article that he had been seeking all his life, and had never found in full perfection.

Mr. Gray over his work said little concerning Ann Packet's occasional visits to his domicile, but he objected to them notwithstanding, for they drew his daughter's attention away from himself. He liked still less Mattie's visits to Chesterfield Terrace—flying visits, when she saw Ann Packet for an hour and Sidney Hinchford, for a minute, looking in at the last moment, and heralded by Ann exclaiming,

"Here's Mattie come to see you, Sir."

"Ah, Mattie!" Sid would answer, turning his face toward the door whence the voice issued, and attempting the feeblest of smiles.

"Is there any thing that I can do, Sir, for you?"

"No, girl, thank you."

He would quickly relapse into that thought again, from which her presence had aroused him—and it was a depth of thought upon which the fugitive efforts of Mattie had no effect. Standing in the shadowy doorway she would watch him for a while, then draw the door to after her and go away grieving at the change in him.

The thought occurred to her that Harriet Wesden might even at that early stage work some amount of good until she heard from Ann Packet that Harriet and her father had called one day, and that Sidney had refused an interview. He was unwell; some other day when he was better; it was kind to call, but he could not be seen then, had been his excuses sent out by the servant maid. Mattie, who had always found time to do good, and work many changes, left the result to time, until honest Ann one evening, when Mr. Gray was at work at his old post, asserted her fears that Sidney was getting worse instead of better.

"I think he'll go melancholic mad like, poor dear," she said; "and it's no good my trying to brighten him a bit. He's wus at that, which is nat'ral, not being in my line, and wanting brightening up myself. He does nothing but brood, brood, brood, sitting of a heap all day in that chair."

"A month since his father died now," said Mattie, musing.

"To the very day, Mattie."

"He goes to church? you read the Bible to him?" asked Mr. Gray, suddenly.

"He can't go by himself: he's not very handy with his blindness, like those who have been brought up to it with a dog and a tin mug," said Ann, in reply; "but let's hope he'll get used to it, and find it a comfort to him, Sir."

"I asked you also, young woman, if you ever read the Bible to him."

"Lor' bless you, Sir! I can't read fit enough for him; I take a blessed lot of spelling with it, and it aggravates him. All the larning I've ever had has come from this dear gal of ours, and he taught her first of all."

"I think that I could do this young man good," said Mr. Gray, suddenly; "I might impress him with the force of the truth—convert him."

"I would not attempt to preach to him yet," suggested Mattie; "besides, his is a strange character; you will never understand it."

"You can not tell what I may be able to understand," he replied, "and I see that my duty lies in that direction. I have been seeking among the poor and wretched for a convert, and perhaps it is nearer home—your friend!"

"I would not worry him in his distress," suggested Mattie anew.

"Worry him! Mattie, you shock me! Where's my Bible? I'll go at once!"

"We've got Bibles in the house, Sir; we're not cannibals," snapped Ann. Cannibals and heathens were of the same species to Ann Packet.

"Come on, then!"

Mattie half rose, as if with the intention of accompanying her father, but he checked the movement.

"I hope you will remain at home to-night, Mattie," he said; "I never like the house entirely left. It's not business."

Mattie sat down again. She was fidgety at the result of this impromptu movement on her father's part, but saw no way to hinder it. Her father was a man who meant well, but well-meaning men would not do for Sidney Hinchford. Sidney had been well educated; her father was self-taught and brusque, and Sidney had grown very irritable. In her own little conceited heart she believed that no one could manage Sidney Hinchford save herself. Late in the evening Mr. Gray returned in excellent spirits, rubbing one hand over the other complacently. He had found a new specimen worthy of his powers of conversion.

"Have you seen him?" asked Mattie.

"To be sure; I went to see him, and he could not keep me out of the room if I chose to enter. An obstinate young man—as obstinate a young man as I ever remember to have met with in all my life!"

"Did he speak to you?"

"Only twice—once to ask how you were. The second time to tell me that he did not require any preaching to. After that I read the Bible to him for an hour, locking the door first, to make sure that he did not run for it, blind as he was. Then I gave him the best advice in my power, bade him good-night, and came away. He is as hard as the nether millstone; it will be a glorious victory over the devil to touch his heart and soften it."

"You are going the wrong way to work. You do not know him!"

"My dear, I know that he's a miserable sinner."

Mattie said no more on the question; she was not a good hand at argument. At argument, sword's point to sword's point, possibly Mr. Gray would have beaten most men; his ideas were always in order, and he could pounce upon the right word, reason, or text, in an instant; but Mattie was certain that her father's zeal very often outran his discretion. She shuddered as she pictured Sidney Hinchford a victim to her father's obtrusiveness—her father, oblivious to suffering, and full of belief in the conversion he was attempting. She knew that her father was wrong, and she felt vexed that Sidney had been intruded upon at a time wherein she had not found the courage to face him herself. Things must be altered, and her promise to Sid's father must not become a dead letter. In all the world her heart told her that she loved Sidney Hinchford best, and that she could make any sacrifice for his sake; and yet Sidney was not getting better, but worse, and her own father would make her hateful to him. The next evening Mr. Gray came home later than usual. He had been sent for by his employers, had received their commissions, and then, fraught with his new idea, had started for Chesterfield Terrace, to strike a second moral blow at his new specimen.

He came home late, as we have intimated, and began arranging his chimney ornaments, and putting things a little straight, in his usual nervous fashion.

"Mattie, I shall have a job with that young man. He has forbidden me the house; he actually—actually swore at me this evening, for praying for his better heart and moral regeneration."

Mattie compressed her lips and looked thoughtfully before her for a while. Then the dark eyes turned suddenly and unflinchingly upon her father.

"I have been thinking lately that if I were with him in that house—I, who know him so well—I might do much good."

"You, Mattie!—you?"

"He is without a friend in the world. I knew his father, who was my first friend, and I feel that I am neglecting the son."

"You call there often enough, goodness knows!" Mr. Gray said, a little sharply.

"He is alone—he is blind. What are a few minutes in a long day to him?"

"All this is very ridiculous, Mattie—speaks well for your kind heart, and so on; but, of course, can't be—"

"Of course, must be!"

Mattie had a will of her own when it was needed. A little did not disturb her, but a great deal of opposition could never shake that will when once made up. She had resolved upon her next step, and would proceed with it. We do not say that she was in the right; we will not profess to constitute her a model heroine in the sight of our readers, who have had enough of model heroines for a while, and may accept our stray for a change. We are even inclined to believe that Mattie was, in this instance, just a little in the wrong; but then her early training

had been defective, and allowance must be made for it. All the evil seeds that neglect has sown in the soil are never entirely eradicated—ask the farmers of land, and the *farmers of souls*.

"Must be!" repeated Mr. Gray, looking in a dreamy manner at his daughter.

"I promised his father to think of him—to study him by all the means in my power. I see that no one understands him but me, and I hear that he is sinking away from all that made him good and noble. I will do my best for him, and there is no one who can stop me here."

"Your father!"

"—Is a new friend, who has been kind to me, and whom I love—but he hasn't the power to make me break my promise to the dead. That man is desolate and heavily afflicted, and I will go to him!"

"Against my wish?"

"Yes; against the wishes of all in the world, if they were uttered in opposition to me!" cried Mattie.

"Then," looking very firm and white, "you will choose between him and me. He will be a friend the more, and I a daughter the less."

"It can not be helped."

"You never loved me, or you would never thus defy me. Girl, you are going into danger—the world will talk, and rob you of your good name."

"Let it," said Mattie, proudly. "It has spoken ill before of me, and I have lived it down. I shall not study it when the interest and happiness of a dear friend are at stake. He is being killed by all you!" she cried, with a comprehensive gesture of her hand; "now let me try!"

"Mattie, you are mad—wrong—wicked!—I have no patience with you—I have done with you if you defy me thus."

"I am doing right; you can not stop me. I have done wrong to remain idle here so long; I will go at once."

"At once!—breaking up this home—you will, then?"

"If I remain here longer you will set him against me—me, who would have him look upon me as his sister, his one friend left to pray for him, slave for him, and keep his enemies away!"

"I won't hear any more of this rhodomontade—this voice of the devil on the lips of my child," he said, snatching up his hat again. "Stay here till I return, or go away forever."

Mr. Gray was in a passion, and, like most men in a passion, went the wrong way to work. He was jealous of this new rival to his daughter's love that had sprung up, and angered with Mattie's attempt to justify her new determination. He believed in Mattie's obedience, and his own power over her yet; and he was an obstinate man, whom it took a long while to subdue. He went out of the room wildly gesticulating, and Mattie sat panting for a while, and trying to still the heaving of her bosom. She had gone beyond herself—perhaps betrayed herself—but she had expressed her intention, and nothing that had happened since had induced her to swerve. If it were a choice between her father and Sidney, why, it must be Sidney, if he would have her for his friend and companion in the future.

"I must go—I must go at once!" she whispered to herself; and then hurriedly put on her

bonnet and shawl, and made for the staircase. She thought that she was doing right, and that good would come of it, and she did not hesitate. Before her, in the distance, sat the solitary figure of him she loved, friendless, alone, and benighted; and her woman's heart yearned to go to him, and forgot all else.

Thus forgetting, thus yearning to do good, Mattie made a false step, and turned her back upon her father's home.

CHAPTER II.

MATTIE'S ADVISER.

MATTIE reached Chesterfield Terrace as the clock was striking nine. Ann Packet almost shouted with alarm at the sight of the new visitor, and then looked intently over Mattie's shoulder.

"He hasn't come back again, has he? Mr. Sidney's been in such a drestful way about him, Mattie. Blind as he is, I think he'll try to murder him."

"I have come instead. He will see me, I hope."

She did not wait to be announced, but turned the handle of the parlor-door and entered. Sidney Hinchford, in a harsh voice, cried out,

"Who's there?"

"Only Mattie. May I come in?"

"Mattie here at this hour! Come in, if you will. What is it?"

He was seated in the great leathern arm-chair, that had been his father's favorite seat, in the old attitude that Mattie knew so well now. She shuddered at the change in him—the wreck of manhood that one affliction had reduced him to, and the impulse that had brought her there was strengthened.

"Mr. Sidney," she said, approaching, "I have come to ask a favor of you."

"I am past dispensing favors, Mattie. Unless—unless it's to listen patiently to that horrible father of yours. Then I say No—for he drives me mad with his monotony."

"I have come to defend you from him, if he call again—to live here, and take care of you as a dear brother who requires care, and must not be left entirely to strangers."

"I am better by myself, Mattie—fit company only for myself."

"No, the worst of company for that."

"It must not be."

"I can earn my own living; I shall be no burden to you; I have a hope—such a grand hope, Sir!—of making this home a different place to you. Why, I can always make the best of it; I think—he thought so, too, before he died."

"Who—my father?" asked Sidney, wondering.

"Yes—he wished that I should come here, and I promised him. Oh! Mr. Sidney, for a little while, before you have become resigned to this great trouble, let me stay!"

He might have read the truth—the whole truth—in that urgent pleading, but he was shut away from light, and skeptical of any love for him abiding any where throughout the world.

"If he wished it, Mattie—stay. If your fa-

ther says not No to this, why, stay until you tire of me and the utter wretchedness of such a life as mine."

"Why utterly wretched?"

"I don't know—don't ask again."

"Others have been afflicted like you before, Sir, and borne their heavy burden well."

"Why do you 'Sir' me? That's new."

"I called your father, Sir; you take your father's place," said Mattie, hastily.

"A strange reason; I wonder if it's true."

Mattie colored, but he could not see her blushes, and whether true or false mattered little to him then. A new suspicion seized him after a while, when he had thought more deeply of Mattie's presence there.

"If this is a new trick of your father's to preach to me through you, I warn you, Mattie."

"I have told you why I am here."

"No other reason but that promise to my father?"

"Yes, one promise more—to myself. Mr. Hinchford," she said, noticing his sudden start,

"I promised my heart, when I was very young—when I was a stray!—that it should never swerve from those who had befriended me. It will not; it beats the faster with the hope of doing service to all who helped me in my wretched girlhood."

"I told a lie, and said you did not steal my brooch!"

"That was not all, but that taught me gratitude. Say a lie, but it was a lie that saved me from the prison—from the new life, worse, a thousand times worse, than the first."

"You are a strange girl—you were always strange. I am curious to know how soon you will tire of me, or I shall tire of you and this new freak. When I confess you weary me, you will go?"

"Yes."

"Then stay; and God help you with your charge."

His lip curled again, but it was with an effort. He was no true stoic, and Mattie's earnestness had moved him more than he cared to evince. He was curious to note the effect of Mattie's efforts to make the dull world any thing better than it was—he who knew how simple-minded and ingenuous Mattie was, and how little she could fathom his thoughts or understand them. He had spent a month of horrible isolation, and it had seemed long years to him—years in which he had aged and grown gray perhaps, it was more likely than not. He felt like an old man with whom the world was a weary resting-place, and he was despondent enough to wish to die and end the tragedy that had befallen him. He had not believed in any sacrifice for his sake, and Mattie had surprised him by stealing in upon his solitude and offering her help. He was more surprised to think that he had accepted her services in lieu of turning contemptuously away. It was something new to think of, and it did him good.

The next day life began anew under Mattie's supervision. She was the old Mattie of Great Suffolk Street days—a brisk step and a cheerful voice, an air of bustle and business about her which it was pleasant to hear in the distance. When the house duties were arranged for the day, Mattie began her needle-work in the parlor

where Sidney sat; and though Sidney spoke but little, and replied only in monosyllables to her, yet she could see the change was telling upon him, and she felt that there would come a time when he would be his dear old self again. When the day was over her own troubles began. In her own room she thought of the father whom she had abandoned—of his loneliness, left behind at his work in that front top room, which had been home to her. She was not sorry that she had left him, for there was an old promise, an old love for Sidney, to buoy her up; but she was very, very sorry that they had parted in anger, and that her father had resented a step in which his Christian charity should have at once encouraged her. By-and-by it would all come right; her father would understand her and her motives; by-and-by, when Sidney had become reconciled to his lot in life, and there were no more duties to fulfill, she would return home, unasked even, and offer to be again the daughter whom her father had professed to love. For the present, life in Sidney's home, doing her duty by him whom she loved best in the world; she could not let him suffer, and not do her best to work a change in him.

Mattie worked a change—a great one. The instinct that assured her she possessed that power had not deceived her; and Sidney, though he became never again his former self, altered for the better. This change strengthened Mattie in her resolves, and made amends for her father's silence. She had written to Mr. Gray a long letter a few days after she had left his home, explaining her conduct more fully, entering more completely into the details of her former relations to the Hinchfords and the friends she had found in them; trusting that her father would believe that she loved him none the less for the step which she had taken—she who would have been more happy had he consented thereto—and hoping for the better days when she could return and take once more her place beside him. She had also asked in her letter that her box might be sent her, and he had considered that request as the one object of her writing, and responded to it by the transmission of the box and its contents, keeping back all evidence of his own trouble and anger. She had chosen her lot in life, he thought; she had preferred a stranger's home to her own flesh and blood; in the face of the world's opinion she had gone to nurse a man of three-and-twenty years of age. After all, she had never loved her father; he had come too late in life before her, and it was his fate never to gain affection from those on whose kind feelings he had a claim. He had been unlucky in his loves, and he must think no more of them. His troubles were earthly, and on earthly affections he must not dwell too much—he must teach himself to soar above them all.

He read the Bible more frequently than ever, attended less to his work, and more to his district society and local preaching; by all the means in his power he turned his thoughts away from Mattie. When the thought was too strong for him he connected her with the wrong that she had done him, and so thought uncharitably of her, as good men have done before and since his time—good people being fallible and liable to err.

Mattie knew nothing of her father's trouble,

and judged him as she had seen him last—angry and uncharitable and jealous! That is a bad habit of connecting friends whom we have given up with the stormy scene which cut the friendship adrift; of stereotyping the last impression—generally the false one—and connecting that with him and her forever afterward. Think of the virtues that first drew us toward them, and not of the angry frown and the bitter word that set us apart; in the long-run we shall find it answer, and have less wherewith to accuse ourselves.

Sidney Hinchford, whom we are forgetting, altered, then, for the better, slowly but surely, even imperceptibly to himself. Still, when Mattie had been a month with him, and he looked back upon the feelings which had beset him before she took her place in his home, the change struck him at last. He could appreciate the kindness and self-denial that had brought her there, gladdened his home, and made his heart lighter. He could take pleasure in speaking with her of the old times, of his father, of his early days in Suffolk Street, in hearing her read to him, in being led into an argument with her, which promoted a healthy excitation of the mind, in walking with her when the days were fine. He was grateful for her services, and touched by them; she was his sister, whom he loved very dearly, and whom to part with would be another trial in store for him some day; and he had thought his trials were at an end long since!

Sidney Hinchford, be it observed here, made but a clumsy blind man; he had little of that concentrativeness of the remaining senses which makes amends for the deprivation of one faculty. He neither heard better nor was more sensitive to touch, and of this he complained a little peevishly, as though he had been unfairly dealt with.

"I haven't even been served like other blind folk," he said; "your voice startles me at times as though it were strange to me."

On one topic he would never dwell upon—the Wesdens. Mattie, true to the dying wish of the old man, attempted to bring the subject round to Harriet—Harriet, who was true to him yet, she believed; but the subject vexed him, and evinced at once all that new irritability which had been born with his affliction.

"Let the past die; it is a bitter memory, and I dislike it," he would say; "now let us talk of the business which you think of setting me up in, and seeing me off in, before all the money is spent on housekeeping."

Mattie turned to that subject at his request; it was one that pleased and diverted him. He was glad to speak of business; it sounded as if he were not quite dead yet. Mattie and he had spent many an hour in dilating upon the chances of opening a shop with the residue of the money which Sidney had saved before his illness, what shop it should be, and how it should be attended. He had only one reason for delaying the prosecution of the scheme: Mattie had implied more than once that when a shop-keeper was found she should give up constant attendance upon him, and only call now and then to make sure that he was well, and not being imposed upon.

"To think of turning shop-keeper in my old

age!" he said one day, with quite a cheerful laugh at his downfall; "I, Sidney Hinchford, bank clerk, who had hoped to make a great name in the city. Well, it is commerce still, and I shall have a fair claim to respectability, as the wholesalers say, if I don't give short weight or false measure, Mattie."

"To be sure you will. But why do you not settle your mind to one business? Every day, Mr. Sidney, you think of a new one."

"You must not blame me for that, Mattie," he replied; "I want to make sure of the most suitable, to find one in which I could take part myself."

"What do you think of the old business in which Mr. Wesden made money? Think of that while I am gone."

"Where are you going now?" he asked, a little irritably.

"To scold the butcher for yesterday's tough joint," said Mattie.

"Butchers make money, but how the deuce could I chop up a sheep without personal damage?" he said, rambling off to a new idea.

Mattie hurried to the door. The butcher was certainly there; but, crossing the road in the direction of the house, Mattie had seen Harriet Wesden. The butcher was dismissed, and Harriet admitted silently into the passage.

"How long have you been here?" Harriet exclaimed.

"A month now. I promised his father that I would do my best for him left behind in trouble. You—you don't blame me?"

"Blame you!—no. Why should I?"

"My father thought that I was wrong to come here—exceeding my duty to my neighbor, and outraging my duty toward him. But I am not sorry."

"And Sid—how is he now? Why does he bear so much malice in his heart against me, as to refuse me admittance to his house?" she asked.

"He bears no malice, Harriet; but the past is painful to him. Presently he will come round, and judge all things truly. Every day he is less morbid—more resigned."

"I am glad of that."

"After all, every thing has turned out for the best, Harriet," said Mattie.

"Prove that," was her quick answer.

Mattie was attempting the difficult task of deciphering the real thoughts of Harriet Wesden;—what she regretted, and what she rejoiced at, now the picture was finished, and all its deep shadowing elaborated.

"For the best that the engagement was ended, Harriet. Think of the affliction that has befallen him, and which would have parted him and you at last."

"Why parted us? Do you think, had it befallen me, that he would have turned away with horror; that he would not have loved me all the better, and striven all the harder to render my trouble less heavy to be borne? Mattie, I knew that this would come upon him years ago, and I did not shrink from my engagement."

"You could never have married him: he is a poor man, and may be poorer yet; it is impossible to say."

"It is all over now, and this is idle talk, Mattie. I have given up all thought of him, as he

has given up all thought of me; and perhaps it is for the best," she added.

"We will hope so, Harriet."

"I always was a foolish and vain girl, prone to change my mind, and scarcely knowing what that mind was," she said, bitterly. "It is easy enough to forget."

Mattie scarcely understood her. She shook her head in dissent, and would have turned the conversation by asking after her father's health—Harriet's own health, which was not very evident on her pale cheeks just then. Harriet darted away from the subject.

"Well—all well," she said; "and how is Sidney in health, you have not told me that?"

"Better in health. I have said that his mind is more at ease."

"Mattie, though I have given him up forever, though I know that I am nothing to him now, and deserve to be nothing, let me see him again! I am going into the country with father for a week or two, and should like to see him once more before I go."

"Harriet, you love him still! You are not glad that it is all ended between you!"

"I should have been here in your place—I have a right to be here!" she said, evasively.

"Tell him so."

Mattie had turned pale, but she pointed to the parlor with an imperious hand. Harriet shrunk from the boldness of the step, and turned pale also.

"I—I—"

"This is no time for false delicacy between you and him," said Mattie; "he loves you in his heart; he is only saddened by the past belief that you loved Maurice Darcy; if you do not shrink to unite your fate with his, and make his life new and bright again, ask him to be your husband. In his night of life he dare not ask you now."

"I can not do that," murmured Harriet; "that is beyond my strength."

"You and your father with him in his affliction, taking care of him and rendering him happy! All in your hands, and you shrink back from him!"

"Not from him, but from the bitterness of his reply to me," said Harriet. "Would you dare so much in my place?"

"I—I think so. But then," she added, "I do not understand what true love is—you said so once if you remember."

Harriet detected something strange and new in Mattie's reply; she looked at Mattie, who was flushed and agitated. For the first time in her life a vague far-off suspicion seemed to be approaching her.

"I will go in and see him; I will be ruled by what he says to me. Leave me with him, Mattie."

With her own impulsiveness, which had led her right and wrong, she turned the handle of the parlor door, and entered the room, where the old lover, blind and helpless, sat.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD LOVERS.

Yes, there he was, the old lover! The man whom she had once believed she should marry and make happy—whom she had valued at his

just worth when he cast her off as unworthy of the love he had borne her. She had not seen him since that time; he had held himself aloof from her, although he had talked of remaining still her friend, and the change in him was pitiable to witness.

It was the same handsome face, for all its palor and deep intensity of thought; the same intellectuality expressed therein, for all the blindness which had come there, and given that strange unearthly look to eyes still clear and bright, and which turned toward her, and startled her with their expression yet. But he was thin and wasted, and his hand, which rested on the table by his side, was an old man's hand, seared by age, and trembling as with palsy.

"What a time you have been, Mattie! Ah! you are growing tired of me at last," he said, with the querulousness characteristic of illness, but before then ever so uncharacteristic of him.

"Miss—Miss Weeden called to ask how you were," said Harriet, in a low voice.

"Indeed!" he said, after a moment's deliberation of that piece of information; "and you answered her, and let her go away, sparing me the pain of replying for myself. That's well and kind of you, Mattie. We are better by ourselves now."

"Yes."

Harriet dropped into a chair by the door, and clasped her hands together; he spoke firmly; he spoke the truth as he thought, and she accepted it for truth, and said no more.

Sidney Hinchford, oblivious of the visitor facing him, and composed in his blindness, detected no difference in the voice. Mattie's voice, we have remarked at an earlier stage of this narrative, closely resembled Harriet's, and acuteness of ear had not been acquired yet by the old lover.

"Mattie, I have been thinking of a new business for us since you have been gone."

"For us?" gasped Harriet.

"Ah! for us, if I can persuade you to remain my housekeeper, and induce your father to extend his consent. I have no other friend; I look to you, girl; you must not desert me yet!"

"No."

"I fancy the stationery business, with you to help me, Mattie, would be best, after all. You are used to it, and I could sit in the parlor and take stock, and help you with the figures in the accounts. I was always clever at mental arithmetic, and it don't strike me that I shall be quite a dummy. And then, when I am used to the place—when I can find the drawers, and know what is in them, I shall be an able custodian of the new home, capable of minding shop while you go to your friends for a while. Upon my honor, Mattie, I'm quite high-spirited about this: say it's a bargain, girl!"

Harriet answered in the affirmative for Mattie. She had assumed her character, and could not escape. She had resolved to go away, and make no sign to him of her propinquity; he cared not for her now; he dismissed her with a passing nod; it was all Mattie—Mattie in whom he believed and trusted, and on whose support in the future he built upon from that day! She knew how the story would end for him and Mattie—a peaceful and happy ending, and what both had already thought of perhaps: let it be

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so; she was powerless to act, and it was not her place to interfere. Mattie had deceived her; it was natural; but she saw no longer darkly through the glass; beyond there was the successful rival, whom Sidney Hinchford would marry out of gratitude!

Sidney continued to dilate upon the prospects in life before him. Harriet had risen, and was standing with her hand upon the door watching her opportunity to escape.

"Who would have dreamed of a man becoming resigned to an utter darkness, Mattie? Who would have thought of me in particular, cut out for a man of action, with no great love for books, or for any thing that fastened me down to the domesticities?"

"You are resigned, then?"

"Well—almost."

"I am very glad."

"Why are you standing by the door, Mattie? Why don't you sit down and talk a little of this business of ours?"

"Presently."

"Now—just for a little while. Leave Ann Packet to the lower regions. I'm as talkative to-day as an old woman of sixty. Why, you will not balk me, Mattie?"

"No."

"Read this for me. I have been trying if I can write in the dark—my first attempt at a benighted penmanship."

He held a paper toward her, and Harriet left her post by the door to receive it from his hands.

The writing was large and irregular, but distinct. She shivered as she read the words. The story she had seen so plainly was more evident than ever.

"*Sidney Hinchford*," she read, "*saved from shipwreck by Mattie Gray!*"

"And Mattie Gray here at my side accounts for my resignation," said he, laying his hand upon Harriet's. "Mattie, the old friend—after all the best and truest!"

Harriet did not reply; she shrank more and more, cowering from him as though he saw her there, the unwelcome guest who had forced herself upon him.

"You are going out," he said, noticing the glove upon the hand he had relinquished now.

"Yes, for a little while."

"Don't be long. Where are you going that I can not accompany you?"

"On business; I shall be back in an instant."

"Very well," he said, with a half-sigh; "but remember that you have chosen yourself to be my protector, sister, friend, and that I can not bear you too long away from me. I wish I were more worthy of your notice—that I could return it in some way or fashion not distasteful to you. Sometimes I wish—"

"Say no more!" cried Harriet, with a vehemence that startled him; "I am going away."

The door clanged to and left him alone. She had hurried from the room, shocked at the folly, the mockery of affection which had risen to his lips. Ah! he was a fool still, he thought; he had frightened Mattie by hovering on the verge of that proposal, which he had considered himself bound to make perhaps, out of gratitude for the life of servitude Mattie had chosen for herself. He had been wrong; he had taken a mean advantage, and rendered Mattie's presence there

embarrassing; his desire to be grateful had scared her from him, as well it might—he, a blind man, prating of affection! He had been a fool and coward; he would seal his lips from that day forth, and be all that was wished of him—nothing more. Harriet had made her escape into the narrow passage, had contrived to open the street-door, and was preparing to hurry away, when Mattie came toward her.

"Going away without a good-by, Harriet!"

"I had forgotten," she said, coldly.

"What have you said to him? Have you—have you—"

"I have said nothing at which you have reason to feel alarmed," said Harriet; "I have not taken your advice. He thinks and speaks only of you, and I did not break upon his thoughts by any harsh reminiscences."

"You are excited, Harriet; don't go away yet, with that look. What does it mean?"

"Nothing."

"Has he offended you?"

"No."

"Have I?"

"No," was the cold reiteration. "I am not well. I ought not to have intruded here. I see my mistake, and will not come again."

"I hope you will, many, many times. I build upon you assisting me in the good work I have begun here. You and I together, in the future, striving for the old friend, Sidney Hinchford."

"I am going away to-morrow—it is doubtful when I shall return, or what use I shall be to either you or him. You understand him better than I."

"I do not understand you this afternoon," said Mattie, surveying her more intently; "what have I done? Don't you," she added, as a new thought of hers seemed to give a clew to Harriet's, "think it right that I should be here?"

"If you think so, Mattie, it can not matter what my opinion is."

"Yes—to me."

"You came hither with the hope of befriending him, as a sister might come? On your honor, with no other motive?"

"On my honor, with none other."

"Why deceive him, then?" was the quick rejoinder; "why tell him that your father gave his consent for your stay here, when he was so opposed to it?"

"He thought so from the first, and I did not undeceive him, lest he should send me away. Have you seen my father?"

"He called last night at our house. He is anxious and distressed about you."

"I am sorry."

"He thinks that you have no right to be here; I think you have now."

"Oh! Harriet, you do not think—"

"Hush! say nothing. You are your own mistress, and I am not angry with you. You have been too good a friend of mine for me to envy any act of kindness toward him I loved once. I don't love him now."

"You said you did."

"A romantic fancy: I have been romantic from a child. It is all passed away now: remember that when he—"

"When he—what?"

"Asks you to be his wife, to become his natural protector; you alone can save him now

from desolation—never my task—never now my wish. Good-by."

She swept away coldly and proudly, leaving the amazed Mattie watching her departure. What did she mean?—what had Sidney said to her that she should go away like that, distrusting her and the motives which had brought her there—she, of all women in the world!

Mattie went back to Sidney's room excited and trembling. Close to his side before she startled him by her voice.

"Mr. Sidney, long ago you were proud of being straightforward in your speech—of telling the plain truth, without peravication."

"Time has not changed me, I hope, Mattie."

"What have you said to Harriet Wesden?"

"To whom!"

The horror on his face expressed the facts of the case at once, before the next words escaped him.

"It was—Harriet Wesden then!"

"Yes."

"And she came in to see me, and assumed your character, Mattie?" he said; "why did you let her in?"

"I don't know," murmured Mattie; "she was anxious about you, and she had come hither to make inquiries without intruding upon you, until I—I advised her to come."

"For what reason?" he asked in a low tone.

"I thought that you two might become better friends again, and—"

"Ah! no more of that," he interrupted; "that was like my good sister Mattie, striving for every body's happiness, except her own, perhaps. Mattie, you talk as if I had my sight, and were strong enough to win my way in life yet. You so quick of perception, and with such a knowledge of the world—you!" he reiterated.

"Misfortune will never turn Harriet Wesden away from any one whom she has loved—it would not stand in the way of any true woman. And oh, Sir! if I may speak of her once again—just this once—"

"You may not," was his fierce outcry; "Mattie, I ask you not, in mercy to me!"

"Why?" persisted Mattie.

"I don't know—let me be in peace."

It was his old sullenness—his old gloom. Back from the past, into which Mattie's efforts had driven it, stole forth that morbid despondency which had kept him weak and hopeless. The remainder of that day the old enemy was too strong for any effort of Sidney's strange companion, and Mattie felt disheartened by her ill success.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW DECISION.

SIDNEY HINCHFORD rose the next morning in better spirits, and Mattie in worse. Half the night in his own room Sidney had reflected on his vexatious sullenness of the preceding day, and on the effect it must have had on Mattie; half the night, Mattie in her room had pondered on the strangeness of the incidents of the last four-and-twenty hours—on that new demeanor of Harriet Wesden, which implied so much, and yet explained so little.

After all, Mattie thought, was she right in

staying there? Had she treated her father well in leaving him without a fair confession of that truth which she had breathed into the ears of a dying man, and scarcely owned till then unto herself? She had not come there with any sinister design of winning, by force, as it were, a place in Sidney Hinchford's heart; she had never dreamed for an instant—she did not dream then—of ever becoming his wife, with a right to take her place at his side and fight his battles for him.

She had been actuated by motives the purest and the best; but who believed her? Had not her father mistrusted her? Had not Harriet, who understood her so well, she thought, regarded her as one scheming for herself?—she whose only scheme was to bring two lovers together once more, and see them happy at each other's side. For an instant she had not thought that she was "good enough" for Sidney Hinchford; she who had been an outcast from society, an object of suspicion to the police, a beggar, and a thief! No matter that she had been saved from destruction and was now living an exemplary life, or that misfortune had altered Sidney and rendered him dependent on another's help, he was still the being above her by birth, education, position, and she could but offer him disgrace.

With that conviction impressed upon her, conscious that Sidney had improved and would continue to improve, an object of distrust to her best friends—why not to the neighbors who watched them about the streets and talked about them?—only judged fairly and honorably by him she served, was it right to stop—was there any need for further stay there?

She was thinking of this over breakfast—afterward in her little business round, during which period another visitor had forced himself into Sidney's presence, without exercising much courtesy in the effort. Ann Packet had opened the street door, and looked inclined to shut it again, had not the visitor forestalled her—she was never very quick in her movements—by springing on to the mat, and thence with a bound to the parlor door.

"Oh, my goodness! you mustn't go in there. Master left word that you were never to be shown into him again on any pretense."

"Where's Mattie?"

"Gone out for orders," said Ann. "Just step in this room, Sir, and wait a bit."

"Young woman, I shall do nothing of the kind. When my daughter comes in, tell her where I am. That's your business; mind it, if you please."

Mr. Gray turned the handle of the door, and walked into the room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hinchford."

Sidney recognized that voice at least—the voice of a man who had worried him to death with his religious opinions—and his face lengthened.

"You here?"

"Yes, I have come again," he answered, drawing a chair close to the table, and confronting Sidney. "I suppose you thought that I had given you up as irreclaimable."

"I had hoped so," was the dry answer.

"Given my daughter up, too."

"No; that wasn't likely."

"Indeed—why not?"

"We don't give up our best friends, those who have won upon our hearts most, in a hurry."

"Do you mean that for me, or is that another side to your confounded obstinacy? Won't you give her up to me, her father?"

"If you wish it. I can not set myself in opposition to you. The remembrance of a dear father of my own would not lead me, did I possess the power, to stand in opposition to you."

"You will side with me, then, in telling her that it is not right to stay here?"

"Not right! You thought so once?"

"Not for an instant."

"She is here with your consent?"

"Did she tell you that? Don't please say that my Mattie ever told you that."

Sidney considered. No, she had not said so, he remembered.

"She came against my will, full of a foolish idea of doing you good, and no power of mine could stop her," said Gray.

"Against your will?"

"I said she did," said Mr. Gray, sharply; "don't you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you. But this is very singular."

Sidney bit his nails, and reflected on this new discovery. After a few moments he said:

"Mr. Gray, I have been forgiving you all the past torture for the sake of your kindness in allowing Mattie to constitute herself my guardian."

"Rubbish!"

"My guardian angel, I might say; for she has saved me from despair, and turned my thoughts away from many deep and bitter things. I was turning against myself, my life, my God, in the very despair of being of use in the world, and she saved me. Do you blame her coming now?"

Mr. Gray took time to consider that question. He bit his nails in his turn, and looked steadily at the young man, who had altered very much for the better.

"I don't find fault with the result—there!" and Mr. Gray looked as though he had made a great concession.

"You would not be a true minister if you did," said Sidney; "and you are not a true father if you don't value the sterling gold in Mattie's character. Pure gold, with no dross in the crucible, not an atom's worth, as I'm a living sinner!"

"We're all living sinners, young man," said he, getting up and beginning to pace the room, as he had paced it, preaching meanwhile, a month ago, and nearly driven Sidney Hinchford out of his mind.

"Do you object to sitting down?" asked Sidney, after bearing with these heavy perambulations for a time.

"Presently; I am going to speak to you in a minute."

"Not in the old fashion, please," said Sidney, quite plaintively; "although I can put up with more now; for Mattie's sake I'll even listen to a sermon, if you'll give me fair warning when you're going to begin, and how long it is likely to last."

"For your soul's sake, as well as Mattie's, you mean, I hope?"

"Any thing, any thing you like!"

"As careless of heavenly matters as ever, I

believe. The task of reformation still unperformed—perhaps left for me, unworthy instrument that I am.”

“Exactly.”

“Eh?”

“We are all unworthy instruments as well as living sinners, you know,” said Sidney, dryly.

“And flippant, too, and on such a subject! But we shall change you in good time.”

“And this morning, now, you will let me off with a small sermon?”

“I haven’t come to sermonize to-day,” replied Mr. Gray, severely; “therefore do not give way to any groundless fears of torturing on my part.”

“Thank you, thank you!”

“I have come to test your sense of justice—fairness of what is due to me from you and Mattie.”

“Test it, friend.”

“Give me back my daughter!”

“Why, that’s what Brabantio says in the play; but I’ll give you a more gracious answer than he got. If you wish her to return with you, why, she must. I would not stop her,” he added, with a sigh, “if it were in my power.”

“You will persuade her to return with me.”

“Was she happy with you?”

“Until your father died, yes.”

“I will tell her,” said Sidney, “that there is right on your side; Mattie will see that. There was right on hers, too, for she had made a solemn promise to a dying man, and she knew well enough that I was desolate. I will persuade her even, if you wish it, but—”

“Go on.”

“But what harm is she doing here?”

“What harm!” echoed Mr. Gray, with an elevated voice; “why, harm to that good name which she has kept for years. What do you fancy people think of her being in this house?—her a stranger to you by blood, and you so young! Sir, she has risked her character by staying here; and I very much doubt if the world is likely to believe her own version of this extraordinary freak.”

“Do you believe it?” asked Sidney.

“Well, I do.”

“And I also; that makes two out of a very few for whose good opinion Mattie Gray cares.”

“While we are in the world we should care for the world’s opinion, Mr. Hinchford.”

“I think not, when it’s a false one. You, a minister, telling me to study the world!”

“I never said that. How aggravating you are, to be sure!”

“Pardon me,” said Sidney, quickly; “a misinterpretation, Mr. Gray. And we must study the world after all; you’re right enough. Poor Mattie! what would she think of this hiss of slander in her ears?”

“I warned her of it, and she braved me.”

“Ah! a brave girl, whose reward will come in a brighter world than this. Well,” he added, sadly, “go she must. I agree with you.”

“I am very much obliged to you; I am going to shake hands with you.”

Mr. Gray and Sidney Hinchford shook hands. Sidney held the minister’s tightly in his grip while he uttered the next words.

“You will bring her with you now and then, to hinder me from wholly sinking back,” he said. “Remember that she is but the one old

friend of the past whom I care to know is by my side, and in whom I can trust. Remember what she found me, what she leaves me, and if you are not wholly selfish you will not always keep her away.”

Mr. Gray was touched by this appeal; his old jealousy vanished completely; he was proud in his heart of this young man’s interest in Mattie.

“I promise that—until we go away, that is, of course.”

“Go away!—whither?”

“Oh! nothing is settled. There was a little talk of appointing me a missionary abroad some time ago—a preacher at a foreign station, where the benighted require stirring words, and the preacher is expected to be continually stirring—preaching, I mean. But it is only talk, perhaps. They may have found a better man,” he added, a little tetchily.

“Should you care to leave England?”

“Care, Sir!—it is my great ambition to do good—to make amends for the evil of my early life.”

“Ah!—yes.”

Sidney had become absent in his manner. Mr. Gray, who had become voluble, discoursed at great length on his peculiar principle of doing good; but Sidney heard but little of his argument, and was engrossed by thoughts of the change coming unto him again, and to which he could not offer opposition. Discoursing thus, and thinking thus, when Mattie returned and stood in the doorway, looking from father to friend.

“Father!” she ejaculated at last.

“Don’t say that you are sorry to see me, after this long parting!” he exclaimed, as he rose in an excited manner, and went toward her with both hands outstretched.

“Not sorry—no—but very, very glad!”

She held his hands, and leaned forward to kiss him. He caught her to his heart then, and the tears welled into his eyes at this evidence of the past parting having been forgotten and forgiven.

“Mattie,” he said, “I have been thinking of all this again—over and over again, patiently, and not in anger—and I still think that it is wrong to stay here.”

“And he—what does he think?” looking toward Sidney.

Sidney answered for himself.

“That, perhaps, we are both too young—blind though I am, and pure as you are, Mattie—to keep house together after this fashion. For your sake I will ask you to go back with your father. I have been wrong and selfish.”

“I said that I would go when you wished it, Mr. Sidney.”

“I wish it, then.”

“Very well.”

“Go—to return again very frequently with your father, and see that I am well, and likely to do well. Mattie, forever after this understand that I can not do utterly without you. Wrong and selfish also in that wish, perhaps, but I am sure of you forgiving me!”

“Yes—yes,” she said, hurriedly. “It is strange that we three should all have been thinking of going away to-day; and perhaps,” with a blush, “it was scarcely right to come. But,” evincing here her old rebellious spirit with a suddenness that made her father and Sidney

leap again, "if he were the same man I found here first I would have stopped—mark that!"

"Yes, but he isn't, my dear," said Mr. Gray, cowed into submission, and afraid of Mattie talking herself into a change of mind; "so it's all happened for the best, and we are all thankful, and—all friends!"

"I will be ready when you wish, then."

"I have ordered a cab to come round at twelve. You see I was sure that you would not turn against me ever again."

"I never turned against you—don't think that."

Mattie went out of the room—was a long while gone—returned with her eyes red and swollen, as though she had been weeping. The cab at the same time rattled up to the door, and Ann Packet, with red and swollen eyes also, if she could have been seen just then, was heard struggling down stairs with Mattie's box, which she had not allowed Mattie to touch.

"Go and talk to Mr. Sidney again, gal. You mayn't have another chance," she had said, and Mattie had started and glared at her as at a phantom. Surely it was time for her to go when this faithful but dull-witted woman saw through the veil which she believed had hidden her true heart from every one on earth. But that must be fancy, she thought, and she went back to the room to bid Sidney good-by, and to check the thanks with which he would have overwhelmed her.

"No thanks, Sir, only my duty to one whose last thoughts were of your happiness, and how it was best to promote it. He had faith in me, and I have endeavored to deserve it, as though he had been watching every action of my own from heaven. Good-by, Mr. Sidney."

"Good-by, best of friends. You will not desert me wholly? your father is on my side now."

"Yes. I shall look in upon you very often, I hope, and you must keep strong, and make up your mind about that business, and—and not think yourself into that low estate ever again. Now I am ready to go."

Mattie and her father left the house the former had brightened by her presence. In the cab she struggled for a while with her forced composure, and then burst forth into irrepressible tears.

"Patience, Mattie. I see the end to this. All's well."

"You see the end to this? No, you can not!"

"Oh! yes, I can."

Mr. Gray uttered not a syllable more during the remainder of the journey; and Mattie, ashamed of her tears, dried her eyes, and asked no further questions.

CHAPTER V.

ANN PACKET EXPRESSES AN OPINION.

SIDNEY HINCHFORD knew that he should miss Mattie, and accordingly made up his mind, as he thought, to the loss. But there is no making up one's mind entirely to the absence of those we love, and upon whom we have been dependent, and Sidney found himself no exception to the rule.

In great things he had expected to miss her,

but in the thousand minor ones, wherein she had reigned dominant without his knowledge, he made no calculation for, and a hundred times a day they suggested the absence of the ruling genius. The house assumed an unnatural and depressing stillness; he felt wholly shut from the world again; no one to whom he could speak, or who, in reply, could assure him that his lot was not worse than other people's, and that there lay before him many methods for its amelioration.

He became more dull and thoughtful; but he did not sink back to his past estate; that was a promise which he had made Mattie before she went away. When she came again—he prayed it might be soon—she should not find him the despondent, morbid being from which her efforts had transformed him. He tried to think the time away by dwelling upon that business in which he intended to embark; but there came the grave perplexity of the general management, and whom to trust, now Mattie had returned to her father's home! Meanwhile, he was wasting money by inaction, and he had always known the value of money, and money's fugitive properties, if not carefully studied.

We say that he tried to think of his new business life, for other thoughts would force their way to the front and take pre-eminence. He could not keep the past ever in the back-ground; before him would flit, despite his efforts to escape it, the figure of his lost love, to whom he had looked forward once as his solace in his blindness. Blindness, with her at his side, had not appeared a life to be deplored, and it was ever pleasant to picture what might have been had the ties between them never been sundered by his will. For he loved her still; the stern interdict upon her name was even a part of his affection; and there were times when he did not care to shut her from his mind—on the contrary, loved to think of her as he had known her once. In these latter days he thought of both Harriet and Mattie; drew, as was natural to one in his condition, the comparison between them; saw which was the truer, firmer, better character, but loved the weaker for all that. That Harriet had not loved him truly and firmly did not matter; he had given her up for his pride's sake, even for her own sake, but he loved her none the less. She would have been unhappy with him after a while; she could not have endured the place of nurse and comforter; she, who was made for the brightness of life, and to be comforted herself when that brightness was shut from her; she was not like Mattie, a woman of rare character and energy.

Mattie troubled him. She had awakened his gratitude; the last day her father had aroused in him his fears that she had rendered herself open to the suspicions of the world by her efforts in his service; he had not thought of that before! Mattie's character was worth studying—it was so far apart from the common run of woman-kind—she had treasured every past action that stood as evidence of kindness to her, and made return for it a thousand-fold. Who would have dreamed of all this years ago, when he tracked her with the police to the Kent Street lodging-house, and was moved to pity by her earnest eyes? Hers had been a strange life; his had been exceptional; his had ended in blank monotony, that nothing could change—what was in

store for her? He thought of the mistake that he had committed on the day that Harriet had personated her unwillingly, and blushed for the error of the act. He had been moved too much by gratitude, and had almost offered his blank life to Mattie, as he thought—Mattie who would have shrunk from him like the rest had she believed that he had had such thoughts of her. His blindness had affected his mind; he had grown heedless, foolish, willful. Then his thoughts revolved to Harriet Wesden again—to the girl who had not lost her interest in him with her love, but had stolen to his solitary house, to ask about him and to note the change in him. She had been always a generous-hearted girl, moved at any trouble, and anxious to take her part in its alleviation—there was nothing remarkable in it. He was still the old friend and play-fellow, after all; and in the future days, when their engagement lay further back from the present, he should be glad to hear her voice of sympathy again.

These thoughts, or thoughts akin to these, traveled in a circle round the blind man's brain, hour after hour, day after day. Thoughts of business, Mattie, Harriet Wesden—varied occasionally by the reminiscences of the dead father, and the relations who had sought him out, whom he had sought, and then turned away from.

Mattie and her father came to see him three days after their formal withdrawal from his home; that was a fair evening, which changed the aspect of things, and which he remembered kindly afterward, notwithstanding a prayer of some duration that Mr. Gray contrived to introduce. Something new to think of was always Sidney Hinchford's craving, and the day that followed any fresh incidents bore less heavily upon him as he rehearsed those incidents in his mind.

Still they had said nothing of the business; they had been more anxious to know how he had spent his time since their departure, and whether Mattie's absence had made much difference to him. Sidney spoke the truth, and Mattie was pleased at the confession. It was an evidence of the good she had done by resisting her father's will, and she was woman enough not to be sorry for the result.

That evening Ann Packet, bringing in the supper to her master, was startled by the question which he put to her.

"How is Mattie looking, Ann?"

"Looking, Sir?"

"Has all this watching, studying my eccentricities, affected her?"

"She's a little pale mayhap—but she has allus been pale since her last illness."

"I never gave a thought as to the effect which the constant study of a monomaniac might produce upon her," he said, half abruptly; "but she's quit of me now, and will improve."

"Oh! she was well enough here—like a bird chirping about the house—Mattie likes something to do for some one. An extraordinary girl, Master Sidney, was ever sent to be a blessing unto all she took to."

"Yes—an extraordinary girl. Sit down."

"No—it isn't for the likes of me to do that here, Sir."

"Sit down, and tell me what you think of her. We don't study appearances in trouble—

and a blind man loves the sound of a woman's voice."

"Then you have altered werry much, Sir."

"Yes—thanks to Mattie again."

"And to think that she was a little ragged gal about the streets, Sir. Many and many a time have I crept to the door after shop was shut, and given her the odd pieces I could find, and she was allus grateful for 'em."

"Always grateful—who can doubt that?"

"She was waiting for the pieces when you came home and lost that brooch—poor ignorant thing, then, Sir."

"Through you then, Ann, we first knew Mattie Gray. Strangely things come round!"

"Ah! you don't know half her goodness, Sir—she's just as kind to any body who wants kindness—just."

"Yes, it is like her!"

"It's a pity her father isn't less of a fidget—she ought to have had a better 'un than that, or have never lighted on him, I think."

"Is she not happy with him, then?"

"She may be, she mayn't; but he is a fidget, and Mattie ought to have some one to take care of her now, and make her happy—like."

"A husband, you mean?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Sit down, Ann. Perhaps you know of some one who is likely to take care of Mattie in the way you think?"

"I don't know."

"Some one who calls and sees her, and in whom she is interested?"

"Oh no! no one calls to see her," said Ann; "her father's jealous of her liking any body save himself. I saw that long ago."

"I should like to see—aha! to see!" he cried—"Mattie happy. She deserves it."

"Those who think so little of themselves seldom find happiness though—do they, Sir?"

Sidney started at the axiom; it was deeper than Ann Packet's general run of observations.

"There are so few of those good folk in the world, Ann."

"Mattie's one."

"Yes—Mattie's one!" he repeated.

"I've often wondered and a-wondered what would make her happy; do you know, Sir, sometimes I think that—that you might, if you'll excuse an ignorant woman saying so."

"That I might! What has made you think that? Sit down—why don't you sit down!"

"Well, just to talk this over, and for my darling's sake, I will for once demean myself;" and Ann Packet, red in the face with excitement, seated herself on the verge of the horsehair chair.

Ann Packet had broken through the ice at last; it had been a trouble of long duration: she who knew Mattie's secret, guessed where Mattie's chance of happiness rested, she thought. But it is delicate work to strive for the happiness of other people, and leads to woeful failures, as a rule.

Ann Packet was nervous; the plunge had been made, and the truth must escape; she dashed into the subject, for "her gal's sake."

"Lookie here, Sir—it's no good my keeping back my 'pinion, that our Mattie is really fond of you! When she was a girl in Suffolk Street, and you a bit of a boy, she used to worry me

about you, and yet I never guessed it! When she grew bigger and you grew bigger, she showed her liking less, but it peeped out at times unbeknown to herself, and yet I never guessed it! But when she was ill in Tencheater Street, and I left here to nurse her, the truth came on me all of a heap, and mazed me drefful!"

"What made you think of this—this nonsense, then?" he asked.

"She spoke about you in her fever when her head was gone," said Ann; "of how your happiness hadn't come, and yet she'd worked so hard for it. And somehow I guessed it then; and when she came here, and was, for the first time, happy in her way, I knewed it!"

"Folly! folly!" murmured Sidney.

"And they who says that she had no right to come here don't know the rights of things; she liked you best of all, Sir, and she comes here, duty bound, to do her best. If they says a word against her in my hearing for her coming here, let 'em look out, that's all!"

Sidney sat, with his fingers interlaced, thoughtful and grave.

"You may go now, Ann. I am sorry that you have put this into my head. It can't be true."

"True or not, just ask her some day when you feel that you can't do without her help, and see who's wrong of us two. And you'll have to ask her, mind that!"

Ann rose and bustled toward the door. At the door a new form of argument suggested itself, and she came back again.

"You're blind enough not to care for good looks so much now; if you can get a good heart think yourself lucky, Sir. You've just the chance of making one woman happy in your life, and in finding your life very different to what it is now, with a blundering gal like me to worry you. She won't think any the wus of you for being blind and helpless. She's much too good for you!"

"Well, that's true enough, Ann."

"I don't say that I'm saying this for your sake, young man," said Ann Packet in quite a maternal manner; "for you're no great catch to any body, and will be a sight of trouble. But I do think that Mattie took a fancy to you ever so long ago, and that it didn't die away like other people's because you came to grief. And if my opinion has discomfirmed you more than I expected, why you asked for it, and I haven't many words to pick and choose from, when I've made up my mind to speak. And I'm not sorry now that I've spoke it any ways."

"I fear Mattie would not thank you, Ann."

"Mattie never knowed what was good for herself so well as for t'other people. I looks after her good like her mother; I don't know that any one else would. And though I'm your servant I'm her friend; and so I asks you, if you've any intentions, to speak out like a gentleman!"

Still suffering from nervous excitement, Ann Packet closed the door, and ran down stairs to indulge in a hysterical kind of croaking with her head in the dresser drawer. It had been a great effort, but Ann had succeeded in it. Her young master knew the whole truth now, and there was no excuse for him. He must give up Mattie or marry her, she thought—either way

her girl would not be "worried" out of her life any longer.

Meanwhile the young master left his supper untouched, and dwelt upon the revelation. Something new to think of!—something to stir afresh the sluggish current of his life.

Was it true?—was it likely?—was it to be helped, if true or likely? Could it be possible that it lay in his power to promote the happiness of any living being still? Could he make happy, above all, the girl whom he had known so long, and who had served him so faithfully? He did not think of himself, or ask if it were possible to love her; possibly for the first time in his life he was wholly unselfish, and thought only of a return for all the sacrifices she had made. He could remember now that hers had been a life of abnegation—that she had risked her good name once for Harriet Wesden—once, and in the latter days, for himself. All this simply Mattie's gratitude for the kindness extended in the old days—nothing more. It was not likely that that ignorant woman below could know all that had been unfathomable to brighter, keener intellects.

But if true, what better act on his part than to gladden her heart and add to the content of his own? He began a new existence with his loss of sight—the old world vanished away completely, and left him but one friend from it—let him not lose that one by his perversity or pride. Still, let him do nothing hastily, and shame both him and her. He would wait!

CHAPTER VI.

MR. GRAY'S SCHEME.

MR. GRAY and his daughter Mattie recommenced housekeeping together on a different principle. Mattie's fitting had impressed Mr. Gray with the consciousness of his daughter possessing a will a trifle more inflexible than his own, and he respected her opinions in consequence. He treated her less like a child, and more like a woman whose remarks were worth listening to. In plain truth, he had become a little afraid of Mattie. He had learned to love her, and was afraid of losing her. Her stern determination to keep her promise—even part with him rather than break it—had won his respect; for he was a firm man himself, and in his heart admired firmness in others.

Father and daughter settled down to home-matters, and worked together in many things; if the daughter had one secret from her father it was the woman's natural aversion to confess to an attachment not likely to be returned, and was scarcely a secret, considering that Mr. Gray had more than an inkling of the truth.

The father did not care to solve the problem that was so easy of solution; he objected to showing any interest in such trivial mundane matters as love-making. He had a soul himself above love-making; which he considered vain, frivolous, and worldly, leading the thoughts astray from things divine. He saw Mattie's perplexity, and even hoped in the good time to alter it, if separation did not have its proper effect. "Presently we shall see," was Mr. Gray's motto; and though he had spoken hopefully to Mattie,

as Mattie had fancied, yet when they were at home again—two prosaic home figures—he kept the subject in the back-ground.

Still he was watchful, and when Mattie began to alter, to become more grave and downcast, as though his home was not exactly the place where she experienced happiness—when she brightened up at any suggestion to visit Sidney Hinchford, he thought less of his own comfort, and more of his daughter's, like a good father as he was, after all.

One afternoon, without apprising that daughter of his intentions, he walked over to Camberwell, to see Sidney Hinchford. That young gentleman had ventured forth into the street, and therefore Mr. Gray had leisure to put things in order during his absence, arrange the mantle-piece, and wheel the table into the exact centre of the room. Any thing out of order always put him in an ill temper, and he wanted to discuss business matters in an equable way, and with as little to disturb him as possible. If any thing besides business leaked forth in the course of conversation he should not be sorry; but he would take no mean advantage of Sidney Hinchford's position. He had a scheme to propose, which might be accepted or declined; what that scheme might end in, he would not say just then. It might end in his daughter marrying Sidney, or it might only tend to that singular young man's comfort and peace of mind; at all events harm could not evolve from it, and possibly some personal advantage to himself, though he considered that *that* need not be taken into account.

Sidney Hinchford returned, and his face lit up at the brisk "Good-afternoon" of Mr. Gray. He turned a little aside from him, as if expecting a smaller, softer hand in his, a voice more musical, asking if he were well, and then his face lost a great deal of its brightness with his disappointment.

"Alone?" he said.

"This time, Mattie is very busy—has a large dress-making order to fulfill."

"She'll kill herself with that needle-work," he remarked; "it is a miserable profession, at the best."

"You're quite right, Mr. Sidney. And talking about professions, have you thought of yours lately?"

"Oh! I have thought of a hundred things. I must invest my capital—such as it is—in something."

"Will you listen patiently to a little plan of mine? I am of the world worldly to-day, God forgive me!" he ejaculated, piously.

"What plan is that? Let us sit down and talk it over."

The local preacher, lithographer, etc., sat down facing Sidney, on whose face was visible an expression of keen interest. In matters of religion, Mr. Gray was long and prosy; in matters of business, quick and terse, a man after Sidney's own heart. Two "straightforward" men like them got through a deal of business in a little time.

"How much money have you at command?"

"A hundred pounds, perhaps."

"So have I."

"What's that to do with it?"

"A great deal, if you like my scheme—nothing, if you don't."

"Go on."

"A hundred pounds might start a business, but it's a risk—two hundred is better. How does Gray and Hinchford sound, now?"

"A partnership?"

"Why not? You're not fit to manage a business by yourself—I'm inclined to think the two of us might make a success of it—the three of us, if Mattie has to assist. I don't see why we should go on like this any longer—you can't stand at this rent—one house may as well hold all of us—why not?"

"You are very kind. I shall be a great trouble to you."

"I hope not. If you are—I like trouble. I shall make a bright light of you in good time!"

Sidney thought of the sermons in store for him, but hazarded no comment. Beyond them, and before all, was the preacher's daughter—the woman who understood him, and who had ever rendered blindness endurable.

"You were speaking a short while since of going abroad. Have you changed your mind?"

"They changed theirs at the chapel. Bless you! they thought they could pitch upon a man so much more suitable! You hear that—so much more suitable!"

"Ah! a good joke."

"I don't see where the joke lies," he said, quickly.

"I beg pardon. No, not exactly a joke—was it?"

"I should say not."

"Well—and this business—what is it to be?"

"I fancy the old idea of a bookseller and stationer's. I can bring a little connection from our chapel together—and there's your friends at the bank."

"No—don't build on them—I have done with them."

"Ah! I had forgotten. But we must not bear enmity in our hearts against our fellow-men."

"True—and this business—where is it to be?"

"We'll look out, Mattie and I, at once."

"Nothing settled yet, then?" said Sidney, with a sigh, who was anxious to be stirring in life once more.

"Nothing yet, of course. I did not know whether you would approve of the scheme. Whether Mattie and I would be exactly fitting company for you."

"Is that satire?"

"My dear Sir, I never said a satirical thing in my life."

"The best of company, then—for you and Mattie are the only friends left me, save that honest girl down stairs."

"Ah! Ann Packet—we must not forget her, or we shall have Mattie scolding us."

"I asked if it were satire, because you are doing me a great service, and saving me from much anxiety. I have been thinking lately that it would be better for me to find my way into some asylum or other, and settle down there apart from the busy world without. You come forward to save me from the streets I have been fearing."

"As Mattie was saved," said Mr. Gray, solemnly; "remember that!"

Mr. Gray shortly afterward took his leave. The same night he communicated the details of

his scheme to his daughter; he could easily read in her face that it was a plan that had her full concurrence. Sidney at home again—Sidney to take care of, and screen from all those ills to which his position was liable!

In a short while a shop in the suburbs of London—not a great distance from Peckham Rye—was found to let. It stood in a new neighborhood, with houses rising round it at every turn. A building mania had set in that direction, and a populous district was springing up there.

"I have always heard that to pitch one's camp in a new neighborhood, if one has the patience to wait, will always succeed. We three have patience, and I think we'll try it."

This was said to Mattie, after she and her father had inspected the premises, and were walking by cross-roads toward Camberwell, to gladden Sidney with the latest news.

"We'll try it—we'll begin home there, father."

"Home in earnest—eh?"

Mattie did not notice the meaning in his tones; she was full of other thoughts.

"It must be a home, that you and I will try to render happy for him—for his own sake—for his dead father's," she said.

"To be sure. And if he be not happy then, it will not be our fault."

"I hope not!"

"Hope not," said her father; "do you think we may fail in the attempt?"

"If we be not careful. We must remember that he is weak and requires support—that he is blind, and can not escape us if we weary him too much."

"Oh! I see—I see," he said, a little agitated; "you are afraid that I shall tire him with the Word of God. Mattie, he's not exactly a Christian man yet, and I should certainly like to make him one. There will be plenty of time for preaching the truth unto him."

"And for leaving it alone."

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated, as though Mattie had fired a pistol in his ear.

"You will believe that I understand him best, and I think that it will not do to attack him too often with our creed. His first disappointment is over—he is teaching himself resignation—he will come round to a great extent without our help—with our help, judiciously applied, he will come round altogether."

"You think a man may be told too often of the error of his ways?"

"Yes."

"Then we shall never agree upon that point."

And they never did. Notwithstanding this, Mr. Gray remembered Mattie's hint, and often curbed a rising attempt to preach to Sidney. When his rigor carried him to preaching point, Sidney listened patiently; when Sidney knew that Mr. Gray's energy was real, and that not one atom of hypocrisy actuated his motives, he respected the preacher, and paid attention to him.

He altered rapidly for the better; he became again almost the Sidney Hinchford of old times—the smile returned more frequently, the brightness of his face was something new; it was pleasant to think that he was not isolated from the world, and that there were friends in it yet to care for him.

He went to church every Sunday in lieu of chapel, somewhat to Mr. Gray's dissatisfaction. He had gone in old days twice every Sunday with his father, and he preferred adopting the old habits to frequenting the chapel whither Mr. Gray desired to conduct him. Sometimes Mattie accompanied him; more often, when he knew his ground, he went by himself, leaving Mattie to her father's escort.

Meanwhile business slowly but surely increased; the connection extended—all went well with these three watchers—each watching for a different purpose, with an equal degree of earnestness.

BOOK VII

SIDNEY'S GRATITUDE

CHAPTER I.

MAURICE HINCHFORD IN SEARCH OF HIS COUSIN.

NEARLY a year had passed away since the firm of Hinchford and Gray started in business and astonished the suburbs. In search of that rising firm a young man, fresh from foreign travel, was wandering in the outskirts of Peckham one February night. A man who had crossed deserts, climbed mountains, and threaded mountain passes with comparative ease, but who was quickly lost in the brick and mortar wilderness into which he had ventured.

This man, we may say at once, was Maurice Hinchford, a man who had seen life and spent a fortune in an attempt to enjoy it. A Sybarite, who had wandered from place to place, from kingdom to kingdom, until even novelty had palled upon him, and he had returned back to his father and his father's business. During this long holiday he had thought much of his cousin Sidney, the man to whom he had taken no passing fancy, and whose life he had helped to blight—whom, by way of atonement, he had once wished to advance in the world.

Sidney Hinchford had been constantly before him during his pilgrimage; before him that indignant figure which had repelled all excuse on the night he reached his one and thirtieth year; he could see it hastening away in the night shadows from the house to which it had been unsuspectingly lured.

On his return, not before, for he had wandered from place to place, and many letters had miscarried—among them the missive which had told him of his uncle's death and cousin's blindness—he heard of the calamity which had befallen Sidney in his absence.

He had been ever a feeling man, and forgetting the past rebuff he had received—thinking, perhaps, that his cousin was in distress, he started at once in search of him. To do Maurice Hinchford justice, it was on the very day on which he had reached London, and before he had seen his mother and sisters. No assurance of his father that Sidney was in good hands contented him; he must judge for himself. He had the Hinchford impetus to proceed at once straightforwardly to work; he was a man who was sorry for the harm he had done in his life—one of those comfortable souls, who are always sorry *afterward*!—a loose liver, with a conscience that would not keep quiet and let events flow on smoothly by him. He had sobered down during his travels, too; he had met with many acquaintances, but no friends—in all his life he had not found one true friend who would have stood by him in adversity, and shared his troubles, even his purse, with him.

Fortunately Maurice Hinchford had not known adversity, and had shared his purse with others instead. A rich man, an extravagant

one, but a man of observation, who knew tinsel from pure gold, and sighed very often when he found himself compelled, perforce, to put up with the tinsel. Life such as his had wearied him of late; men of his own class had sworn eternal amity, and then laughed at him when his back was turned; men of a grade inferior had toadied him, cringed to him, sponged upon him; women had flattered him for his wealth's sake, not loved him for his own—all had acknowledged him one of those good fellows of which society is always proud; but for *himself* nobody cared save his own flesh and blood; he could read that fact well enough, and its constant reiteration on the faces of "his set" annoyed him more than he could have believed.

This favorite of fortune, then, annoyed with society's behavior, had started forth in search of Sidney an hour after the news was learned from his father's lips. He had a great deal to say to Sidney; he had not entered into any explanations in that letter which Sidney had coolly responded to—he could say more *rien* *rien*; and now the storm was more than a year old: his cousin would surely put up with more, and listen to him.

But, firstly, Maurice Hinchford had to find his cousin; and having wandered from the right track it became a matter of some difficulty. He had strayed into a "new neighborhood"—a place always famous for its intricacies—and he floundered about new streets and half-finished streets, asking manifold questions of the aborigines, and receiving manifold directions, which he followed implicitly, and got lost anew in consequence.

The stragglers were few and far between, and Maurice waited patiently for the next arrival, standing under a lamp-post at the corner of a street. He had given up all hope in his own resources, and had resolved to enlist the next nondescript in his service, be his terms whatever his rapacity dictated. But the next nondescript was a woman, and he was baffled again. A young woman in a great hurry, to whom he could not offer money, and whose progress he scarcely liked to arrest, until the horror of another vigil under that melancholy gas-lamp overcame his reluctance to intrude.

"I beg pardon," he said, hastily; "I am looking for Park Place. Will you oblige me, Miss, by indicating in which direction it may lie *now*?"

"As straight as you can go, Sir."

"Ah! but, confound it, I can't go straight. Not that I'm intoxicated," he said, quickly, seeing his auditor recoil and make preparations for a hasty retreat, "but these streets are incomprehensibly tortuous."

The listener seemed to look very intently toward him for an instant. The voice appeared to strike her.

"Whom do you want in Park Place?" was the quick answer.

"A Mr. Hinchford, of the business of Gray and Hinchford."

"You are his cousin Maurice?"

"By George! yes. How did you know that?"

"I guessed it; that's all."

"You are a shrewd guesser, Miss," he said.

"Yes, I am his cousin Maurice, and you are—"

"Mattie Gray, his partner's daughter."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I have seen you once before; you brought your father, some years ago, to a stationer's shop in Great Suffolk Street."

"Right—a retentive memory."

"I seldom forget faces—it is not likely that I should have forgotten yours."

"Why not?"

"I have heard so much of you since then," was the answer, cold and cutting as the east wind that was swooping down the street that night.

"Oh! have you?"

Maurice walked on by her side; after a few moments Mattie said to him,

"What do you want with Sidney?"

"Many things. I am anxious to see him—very anxious."

"Your presence can but give him pain; why expose him to needless suffering by this intrusion?"

"I have a hope that it will not be considered an intrusion, Miss Gray," said Maurice, stiffly.

"I can see no reason why you should hope that."

"I am his relation—his—"

"Sir, I know what you are," said Mattie, sharply; "I know all your history, and all the harm you have done to him, and Harriet Weeden, and me."

"And you!—and you, Miss!" he repeated, harshly.

"An evil action spreads evil in its turn, and there is no knowing where it may end, Mr. Hinchford," said Mattie; "yours affected my character."

"I don't see that—how was that possible?"

"While you were playing your villain's trick on Harriet Weeden I was searching the streets for her. I kept her secret after her return, and, therefore, could not give my employer a fitting reason for my absence from the business left in trust to me. I was discharged."

"I am very sorry," said Maurice, energetically; "upon my soul I had no idea of all the harm my folly—my villainy, if you will—had caused till now! Miss Gray, you don't know how sorry I am!"

"I don't care."

"Is that merciful or womanly?"

"Perhaps not. But I will believe that you are sorry if you will not accompany me further."

"Miss Gray, I must come. More than ever, I am resolved to see him to-night."

"Very well."

They went on together, both walking at a brisk pace, Maurice a little discomfited, and with his head bent down and his hands behind him.

"May I ask," he said, after some moments' silence, "if he be well?"

"He is well."

"Blind still?"

"Yes."

"May I ask you, as his friend, let me say, if his means be adequate to his support?"

"Ah! you have come to ask him that—to see that for yourself?"

"Not exactly—it is one of many reasons."

"Keep that from him, then," cried Mattie; "spare him that humiliation."

"Why humiliation, Miss?"

"It is humiliation, it is an insult, to offer help to the man whose life you have embittered. You that have known Sidney, worked with him in your office, professed to be his friend, should have fathomed that part of his character, at least, which is based upon his pride. Sir, I doubt if he esteem you very much, but he will certainly hate you if you talk of money."

"Then I'll not talk of it."

"And you'll not go back?"

"I never go back," said Maurice; "I'm a Hinchford."

"All the Hinchfords whom I have known have been honest, earnest men, striving to do good, and detesting cunning and disguise. I hope that you are the first that has disgraced the name."

"I hope so. Phew! how hot it is!"

Maurice Hinchford felt exceedingly uncomfortable under these continued attacks; still there was a novelty in all this dispraise and plain-speaking. A brusque young woman this, whose character interested him, and whose warmth in his cousin's service he respected despite the darts with which she transfixed him.

He did not flinch from the purpose he had formed, however. He was anxious to see his cousin, to receive the attack in full, and defend himself; to prove to Sidney, if it were possible, that he was not quite the unprincipled villain that was generally supposed. So he kept on his way, and this first little dash of the waters of opposition against him did not affect him much. Mattie's energetic advice puzzled him, certainly; she spoke warmly in Sidney's cause—as if she were interested in him, and had a right to take his part—was there any reason for that brisk attack upon him, save her own outraged dignity at the slander which, by his means, had indirectly fallen upon her? He kept pace with her, but did not speak again. She was not inclined to reply with any "graciousness" to his questions; he saw that he had annoyed her already by the object of his mission, and that it was the better policy, the truer act of courtesy, to maintain a rigid silence.

Mattie spoke first.

"This is the house," she said, stopping before a shop already closed for the night. "You are still of the same mind?"

"Yes."

"You can not do good here—you may do harm."

"Your pardon, but I am of a different opinion."

"Very well then."

Mattie gave a little impetuous tug to the bell; Ann Packet opened the door, and Mattie and her unwilling escort passed into the shop, the latter the object of immense attraction from the round-eyed, open-mouthed serving-maid. Events flowed on so regularly and monotonously in that quarter of the world that the advent of a tall, well-dressed stranger was a thing to be remarked, and, Ann Packet hoped, to be explained.

Mattie ran at once into the parlor, where her

father was sitting over his work. He looked up with a bright smile as she entered.

"Where's Sidney, father?"

"In his own room."

"Here is his cousin. Sidney must be prepared to see him, or to deny himself to him."

"What cousin is that?" Mr. Gray asked, a little irrelevantly, being taken aback by the news.

Mattie explained, and ran up stairs. Mr. Gray pushed aside the stone upon which he had been writing, turned up his coat-cuffs, and buttoned his black coat to the chin. He knew the story in which that cousin had played his part perfectly well; had he forgotten it, his remembrance of old faces would not have betrayed him in this instance. Here was the man to whom he had administered a fugitive lecture in the dead of night at Ashford railway station once more before him; here was a chance of touching the heart of a most incorrigible sinner—a sinner worthy of his powers of conversion. He would tackle him at once; he would warn him of the errors of his ways, and of the infallible results of them, if he did not listen to the warning voice. He was just in the mood for delivering a sermon, and there was no time like the present. Now for it!

Mr. Gray turned the handle of the parlor door and skipped into the shop.

CHAPTER II.

MAURICE RECEIVES PLENTY OF ADVICE.

MAURICE HINCHFORD had been told by Mattie to wait in the shop until she returned; and, obedient to her mandate, he had taken his seat on a very tall, uncomfortable stool, on which he could have remained perched more at his ease had a balance-pole been provided. Here he had remained, looking round the shop, and taking stock of its manifold contents—glancing askance now and then at Ann Packet, whose curiosity was not entirely satiated until Mr. Gray intruded on the scene.

At the first click of the door-handle Maurice looked round expecting to see his cousin, but was disappointed by the presence of a small and agile man in black, who leaped on to a second chair beside him, and commenced nodding his head vigorously.

"Good-evening, Sir," said Maurice. "Mr. Gray, I presume?"

"We have met before, Sir; my name is Gray."

"Really! I do not remember—"

"Possibly not, Sir; there are many unpleasant reminiscences we are always glad to escape from," said Mr. Gray. "I am connected with one. You and I met on the platform of the Ashford railway station, one winter's night, when Miss Wesden claimed my protection from a snare that had been laid for her."

"Oh!"

Maurice had dropped into a hornet's nest. Whom next was he to confront before his cousin Sidney came upon the scene? from whom else was he to hear a sharp criticism on those actions of the past, which no one regretted more than he. Luck was against him that night.

"You remember me?" said Mr. Gray. "Before the train departed I gave you a little counsel for your future course in life—a warning as to whither a persistence in your evil habits would lead you; you remember?"

"Oh yes; I remember."

"Have you taken that warning to heart? I fear not. Have you been any wiser, better, or more honest from that day? I fear not. Have you not rather proceeded on your evil course, despising the preaching of good men, the warning of God's word, and gone on, on—down, down, without a thought of the day when all your actions in this life would have to be accounted for?"

Bang came Mr. Gray's hard hand on the counter, startling Maurice Hinchford's nerves somewhat, and causing innumerable articles in the glass cases thereon to jump spasmodically with the shock.

"I—" began Maurice.

"Don't interrupt me, Sir—I will not be interrupted! You have come hither of your own free-will, seeking us out, and fearing not the evidence of our displeasure; and now, Sir, you must hear what is wrong in your acts, and what will be good for your soul. Do you know, oh sinner! that that soul is in deadly peril?"

"I know—"

"Sir, I will not be interrupted!" cried Mr. Gray again; "I am not accustomed to be interrupted when I am endeavoring to awaken a hardened conscience to a sense of its condition, and I will not be now. And I call upon you at this time—now is the accepted time, Sir, now is the day of salvation—to amend, amend, amend! You have been a spendthrift, profligate, every thing that is bad; you have studied yourself in every action of life, and neglected the common duties due to your neighbor as well as to your Maker. You have gone on smiling in your sinful course, heeding not the outcry of religious men against your hideous career, recking not of the abyss into which you must plunge, and on the brink of which, you—a man, with an immortal soul committed to your charge—are standing now! One step more, perhaps, one willful step forward, and you are lost forever. *Lost!*" he shouted, with the frenzy of a fanatic, as well as the vehemence of a good man carried away by his subject; and the shrill cry made the glasses round the gas lamps ring again, and vibrated unpleasantly through Maurice's system. This was becoming unendurable.

"If you will allow me—" began Maurice.

"Sir, I will not be interrupted!" shouted Mr. Gray, with more hammering upon the counter; "I know what is good for you, and I insist upon a patient hearing. You are a man in danger of destruction, and I can not let you go blindfold into danger without bidding you stop while time is mercifully before you. Let me divide the subject, in the first place, into three heads."

Maurice groaned inwardly, and stared at the preacher. There was no help for it; there was no escape. He might jump to the floor and fly for his life; or he might tip up Mr. Gray's chair, upset that gentleman, and then gag him; but neither method would bring him nearer to that purpose for which he had ventured thither; and until Sidney appeared there was nothing to do but sit patiently under the infliction and listen

to the full particulars of his dangerous state. He put his hands on his knees, surveyed the speaker, and submitted; in all his life he had never heard such a bad opinion of himself, or listened to so sweeping a condemnation of all his little infirmities. Mr. Gray ran on with great volubility, pitching his voice unpleasantly high; Maurice's blood curdled, once he was sure his hair rose upon his head, and more than once cold water running down the curve of his backbone could not have more forcibly expressed the sensations of the moment. And then those horrid bangs upon the counter, always coming when least expected, and going off like cannon-shots in his ears; and the gesticulatory flourishes, and the falsetto notes when more than usually excited, and, above all, the unceasing flow of invective and persuasion—an unintermittent shower-bath of the best advice, powerful enough to swamp a congregation.

Maurice's head ached; his eyes watered; the shop grew dizzy; the books and prints revolved slowly round him; the ceiling might be the floor, and the floor the ceiling, with the gas branch screwed upside down in it, for what he knew of the matter; he lost the thread of the discourse, and found the heads thereof inextricably confused; he understood that he was a miserable sinner—the worst of sinners—or he should not be sitting there with all those horrible noises in his ears; the figure in the chair before him, heaved up and down, moved its arms right and left, possibly threw double somersaults; it was all over with the listener—he was going silly, he scarcely knew now with what object he had come thither—oh, his head!—oh, this never-ending, awfully rapid Niagara of words!

He made one feeble effort at resistance.

"Look here, old fellow—if you'll let me off—I'll—I'll build a tabernacle!" he burst forth; and again that terrible "Sir, I will not be interrupted!" stopped all further intrusion upon the subject of discourse.

Mr. Gray was delighted with that subject, with that listener—one of the finest specimens of iniquity he had encountered for many years!—and he did not think of stopping yet a while. Where was the hurry? time, although valuable, could not be better spent than on that occasion—his heart was in the task he had set himself, and he would do his very best!

Mattie came to the rescue at last; she had been watching the delivery of the sermon for some time over the parlor blind, informing Sidney, who had entered the parlor, of the energy of the father and the patient endurance of his cousin.

Disturbed as he had been by his cousin's arrival, and undecided for some time as to the expediency of granting him an interview or not, Sid could not refrain from a smile at Maurice's unenviable position. He remembered Mr. Gray's first charge upon his sins, and the unsparing length to which he had extended his remarks upon them; he could imagine the position of Maurice Hinchford at that juncture, and realize the feelings with which that gentleman heard and suffered.

"I think I'll go to him now, Sidney," said Mattie.

It had been Sidney and Mattie—as between brother and sister—for a long time now.

"Will your father admire the intrusion?" asked Sid, dryly.

"Perhaps he is doing good," said Mattie, who regarded matters akin to this more seriously than the blind man; "I'll wait a while."

And all this time Maurice was praying for help. It had not been a very pleasant idea, that of facing his cousin for the first time; but now the thought occurred to him that he would rather face the very worst—even that obnoxious being, of whom the preacher earnestly warned him—than hear this man inveigh against his sins any more.

Mattie quietly entered the shop. The spell was broken; Mr. Gray paused with his right arm above his head—he was just coming down with another bang on the counter—and Maurice leaped off his stool, to which he had been transfixed, and shook hands violently with Mattie in his bewilderment.

"He will see me, Miss Gray?"

"Yes. If you wish it."

"Thank you—thank you! Is he in the parlor?"

"Yes."

"And so be warned, young man—there is no excuse left you—not one, now. You have been warned of all the evils which a guilty life incurs upon those who go on their way defiantly!"

"Oh yes—I have been warned, Sir; there's not a doubt of it—I'm afraid I have put you to a great deal of trouble?" said Maurice, not yet recovered from his confusion.

"In a good cause I don't mind trouble."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. In the parlor, you said, Miss Gray?—then I'll go to him at once. It must be getting very late."

Mr. Gray was proceeding to follow Maurice, when Mattie touched him on the arm and arrested his progress.

"I think we had better leave them together. Their business is scarcely ours."

"What?—ah! exactly so, my dear. But I wish you had not interrupted me quite so unceremoniously—the impression I was making upon that young man was wonderful! Great Heaven! if it is left for me to work his regeneration at the last, how proud I shall be! Mattie, I think I have moved him; he has already said something about building a tabernacle, a chapel, or something; but I scarcely caught the words at the moment. Think of that man, so wicked, and perverse, and designing, proceeding, after all, in the straight and narrow way! It's wonderful!"

In the mean time Maurice Hinchford had entered the parlor, closed the door behind him, and advanced toward the figure at the table, sitting in the full light of the gas above his head. Maurice paused and looked at him.

Sidney had changed; he was looking older; there was a thread or two of silver in the dark waving hair; and the eyes, which blindness had not dimmed, had that melancholy vagueness of expression by which such eyes are always characterized.

"Well, Sidney, I am here at last."

"I am sorry that you have taken the trouble to call."

"Indeed!—why?"

"I think you and I are best apart. We know each other far too well by this time."

"Have patience with me, Sidney. I think not."

He drew a chair nearer his cousin, and sat down. He had not offered to shake hands with Sidney; he felt that his cousin would have resented that attempt; that he was regarded as a man who had done a grievous wrong, and from whom no professions of friendship or cousinly regard would be received. He had come with a faint hope of doing good—in some way or other, he scarcely knew himself; of extenuating in some way—almost as indefinite to him—the past conduct which had placed him in so sinister a light.

"Sidney," he said, "I wish that you had accepted that invitation to meet me which I made you. I could have explained much."

"No explanation, Maurice, would have been satisfactory to me at that time."

"Will it be now, then?" he asked, eagerly catching at the words which implied possibly more than his cousin had wished to convey.

"I would prefer dismissing the subject altogether," Sid replied. "If you will tell me candidly and honestly that you are sorry for the past, I will be glad to hear it—and believe it."

"You bear me no malice, then?"

"No—I have outlived it."

"Then you will—"

"I will do nothing but remain with those good friends who have taken pity on my helplessness," he said, sternly.

"Sidney, pray understand me. I don't wish you to think me a wholly bad man—God knows I am not that—I have never been that. I have had bad friends, evil counselors, if you will—mine was never a resolute nature, but one easily led away from the first. I was an only son, spoiled by an indulgent father, spoiled by the money which was lavished on me, spoiled by the crowd which the spending of that money brought about me—nothing more."

"That is bad enough," said Sid.

"I own that. I own that I was flattered by my moral ruin, Sidney; that they who called themselves my friends cheered on that downfall, and made it easy to me—scoffing at all worlds purer than their own. I was young, vain, impressionable, and far from high-principled when I first met Harriet Wesden at Brighton."

"I would rather not hear the story," said Sidney, uneasily.

Maurice paid no heed to the remark, but went on hastily; and Sidney, suppressing his intention to arrest the narrative, sat still and listened to its weaknesses, its mystery, and yet its truth.

"Harriet Wesden was a romantic school-girl—a young woman who knew little of life, or had read the fictions, highly-colored, concerning it, till she might have belonged to dream-land for the realities about her. She was led away by a senior scholar, too, as romantic as herself, and more designing; and she and I met, talked, corresponded—fell in love with each other."

"I deny that."

"Patience, Sidney; on my soul we did! I was not a villain, but a man led away by my vanity and this girl's preference for me, and I loved her. I don't say that it was a very true or passionate love; but it was a love which burned fiercely enough for a time—which would have been purer and better but for the evil counsel-

or and false friend who was always with me, to treat life, and love, and honor as a jest."

"The man I met at your house?"

"No. A man who has died since—thank God, I was almost adding, for he worked me much evil, and death only freed me from him."

"Go on."

"When Harriet Wesden and I parted I believe we truly loved each other. I had assumed a false name at the outset, and had maintained it throughout our strange courtship—fearing the discovery of governesses, and not knowing the character of her to whom my folly had lured me. I was to go abroad at my father's wish, and I left, fully resolving to write to her, and own all, and ask her if she would wait for me. Then came long absence, fresh scenes, new friends, new dissipations, a belief that she would easily forget me, being but a child when I had seen her last; and so the old, old story, varied scarcely from the many that have gone before it. Sidney, she did forget me—did discover that, after all, it was but a fleeting fancy of her own."

"No."

"I think the next part of my story proves that. I met her again after an absence of a few years in the streets, near her house in Suffolk Street, whither I had conducted my father to see yours. All my old passion for her revived; but it was a struggle with her to endure my presence at first. Still I was from the old days; I revived in her memory the one romance that had been hers; I had not played a false part therein, and could easily excuse my long silence. I found out the friends whom she visited in the neighborhood of New Cross; I formed their acquaintance, and met Harriet Wesden more frequently. Her old assertion that she never wished to see me again—that she loved another, whose name she would never confess to me—wavered. I saw it, and, carried away by the impression created, I did my best to win her."

"Away from me?—well, you succeeded. She wrote to me at that time, confessing her inability to think of me longer as a lover."

"She wrote, not knowing her own mind, I believe. At that time she was disturbed in thought concerning us—she was often cold and repellent to me, and it was difficult to understand her. Well, Sid, throughout all this, I loved her."

"Why keep to your false name, then?"

"I was ready to confess the truth, at every interview; then I put off the avowal, after my old fashion. I knew by that time that your father and yourself were lodging at the stationer's shop, and I formed a shrewd guess as to the rival I had in her affections. Finally, Sid, there came that night at New Cross, when she was carried away to Ashford. As I hope to be saved, I had no design against her then; in good faith, I was her escort to the railway station; it was only as we approached that station that the ruse suggested itself—that the devil whispered in my ear his temptation. I knew the time of the mail-train; I had been by it en route to Paris only a few weeks since; I led her along, unsuspecting of evil, to the other side of the railway station. She was with me in the carriage before I became conscious of the heinousness of the act I had committed. Even then I intended her no harm; I trusted all to circumstance; I was even prepared

to marry her rather than lose her; I was under a spell, Sidney!"

"Yes, the spell of the devil."

"When she discovered the truth I found that I had secured her hate rather than her love. At Ashford station she faced me like a tigress, and, full of the honest indignation that possessed her, held me up to the shame I deserved before a host of people; pointed me out as a coward and knave who had sought to cruelly deceive her. She claimed the protection of that—that terrible man in the shop there. He was at Ashford, as you know—and I was glad to hide my head in the railway carriage, and be borne away from his withering contempt. That's the story. I will not tell you of the sorrow which I experienced for the harm that I had done her; of the shame that has remained with me since then; of the turn which she even gave to my character. Sidney, I would have made any reparation in my power, but I was baffled and degraded, and dared not look upon her any more."

"That man I met at your house, he knew the story?"

"He knew the beginning of it; and for Harriet Wesden's sake, and to redeem her character in the mind of a man who has not a high estimate of women, I told the end."

Sidney sat and thought for a while. Then he pronounced his verdict.

"All this assures me that you are easily led away; that it is only chance that has kept you from being wholly a bad man. You are weak, vacillating, and unprincipled—you are no Hinchford."

"I have tried to do my best all my life, but somehow failed," said Maurice, ruefully; "impulse has led me wrong when my heart has meant right; candidly, cousin, I have been a fool more than once. But you can not believe that I would do harm to any human being in cold blood?"

"Possibly not. But what virtue is there in that?"

"Let me add, Sidney, that I honestly believe that I have been altering for the better for the last two years. I have seen the emptiness of all my friends' professions; their greed of gain and love of self; have turned heart-sick at their evil-speaking, lying, and slandering. I feel that I haven't a friend; that I have 'used up' all the pleasures in the world, and that there is nothing I care for in it."

"Yours is a bad state, that leads to worse, as a rule, Maurice."

"I know it; I feel it."

"And you are truly sorry for all the harm that you have done us in life—Harriet, I, and others?"

"With all my heart, truly sorry."

"I can forgive you, then. I have been taught by good friends to be more charitable in my heart toward men's motives. A year ago I thought I should have hated you all my life."

He held forth his hand, which Maurice took and shook heartily in his.

"Understand me," said Sidney, still coldly, "I forgive you, but I do not need your help, and your presence, under any circumstances, will always give me pain. We shall never be true friends—we shall respect each other better apart."

"Is it fair to think that? You who have heard me declaim against my vain and objectless life."

"Yours is a life to rejoice at, and to do good with, not to mourn over. Seek a wife, man, and settle down in your sphere, honored by good men and honoring good things."

"Ah! fair advice; but the wife will come for my money's sake, for the good things which I possess, and which she and her relations will honor in their way, with all their heart, and soul, and strength!"

"Timon of Athens!" said Sidney, almost satirically.

"Sidney, I would give up all my chances for one or two true friends. You don't know what a miserable wretch I am!"

"You will be better presently. You have seen too much life lately, and the reaction has rendered you *blasé*. Patience and wait. As for the wife—"

"Well?"

"Seek out Harriet Wesden again, and do her justice."

"But you—"

"She never loved me, Maurice; you were her first love, and her last. She is leading a life that is unfit for her, and you can make amends for all the shadows you have cast upon it."

"I could never face her."

"Then you are a greater coward than I thought."

"It's odd advice," he muttered; "seek out Harriet Wesden again! Oh! I know how that will end, and what 'good' will result from that. But you wish it?"

"Yes," said Sidney, after a moment's further reflection.

"And her address?"

Sidney repeated it; he took it down in his pocket-book, and then rose to depart.

"I am going now. I may trouble you once again, Sidney, if you will allow me."

"As you wish—if you think it necessary."

Maurice Hinchford shuffled with his feet uneasily, keeping his eyes fixed on his blind cousin.

"May I ask," he said, at last, "if—if you are happy here?"

"Yes, as happy as it is possible for one in my condition to be."

"They are kind to you?"

"Very kind."

"They are a sharp couple—father and daughter—they—"

"Oh! don't speak ill of them, Maurice; you do not know them, and can not estimate them at their just worth."

"I might endure the daughter, for hers is a pleasant sharpness that one doesn't object to; but, oh! that dreadful vigorous little parson, or whatever he is."

"Good-night!" said Sidney, meaningly.

"One moment; I'm off in a minute now, Sid. There's one thing I did wish just to allude to—nothing about money, mind," he added, hastily, noticing Sidney's heightened color and proud face, and remembering Mattie's previous caution.

"What is it?" asked Sidney.

"I did wish to say how sorry I was to hear of the calamity that had befallen you—that the bad news, which was told me to-day for the first time, has shocked me very much. But you'll not be—"

lieve me. You still think I'm hard, cruel, and indifferent."

"No, I don't think that. But I don't care to dwell upon a painful topic."

"And about advice—what medical advice have you had, may I ask?"

"Not any."

"No advice!—why not?"

"I was told long ago that when blindness seized me it would be irretrievable. I was warned of its approach by an eminent man, who was not likely to make a mistake."

"We are all liable to mistakes in life," said Maurice, "and it might happen—"

"Pray dismiss the subject, Maurice."

"I met with a foreign oculist in Paris—he was an Italian, I think—who—"

"Good-night—good-night," said Sidney, hastily; "when a man has been trying hard to teach himself resignation it is not fair to disturb him with ideas like these."

"Your pardon, Sid; I am going at once. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Sidney did not extend his hand again, and Maurice made no attempt to part in a more friendly manner than they had met; profuse civilities could do no good, and though Maurice had gained his cousin's forgiveness he had not roused his respect or won upon his sympathy.

He passed into the shop, and took up his hat that he had left there on the counter. Mr. Gray looked at him as at a fine subject which adverse fate was to snatch away from his experiments.

"You are going, young man?"

"Yes, Sir; I hope I have not put you or your daughter to any inconvenience."

"No, Sir," was his reply, beginning to turn up the collar of his coat above his ears, "no inconvenience. You are a stranger to this neighborhood, and I'll just see you in the straight way, if you'll allow me."

"Oh! dear no, thank you," said the alarmed Maurice; "I'm well up in the way now—I could not think of taking you away from home at this time of night—thank you, thank you!"

He seized his hat, dashed at the lock, wrenched open the door, and flew for his life down the dark streets—no matter whither, or how far out of his route, so that he escaped Mr. Gray's companionship.

Half an hour afterward he was at New Cross railway station—the scene of his old duplicity—arranging for a telegraphic message to a Dr. Bario, resident in Paris.

CHAPTER III.

A DECLARATION.

HARRIET WESDEN had settled down like the rest of the world, that is, this little world where-in live and breathe—at least we hope so—these characters of ours.

She had settled down. Life had taken its sombre side with her; the force of circumstances had set her apart from those for whom her heart yearned; she became bound more to this dull home; disappointment had wondrously sobered her; when her heart had been at its truest and best, it had seemed as though the whole world had turned against her and misjudged her.

There was no romance in her after that: her romance had begun early and died early: for her share in it she was heartily ashamed. To look back upon that past, note her weakness, and whither it had led her, was to make her cheeks flush and her bosom heave: in those sober after-days that had come to her she could scarcely comprehend the past.

Women change occasionally like this, more especially women whose hearts are sound, but whose judgments have not always been correct. She had met deceit face to face; her own presence of mind had only saved her perhaps from betrayal; she had passed through a vortex, and, escaping it, the shock had sobered her for life.

Harriet Wesden turned "serious"—a very good turn for her, and for all of us, if we could only think so. Still, serious people, more especially serious young people, are inclined to dash headlong at religion, and even neglect home duties, duties to friends and neighbors and themselves, for religious ones. They verge on the extremes even in sanctity, and extremes verge on the ridiculous.

Harriet Wesden gave up life's frivolities, and became a trifle austere in her manner; she had found a church to her taste, and a minister to her taste—a minister who verged on extremes too, and yet was one of the best-meaning, purest-minded men in the world.

Harriet Wesden became his model member of the flock, as he became her model shepherd. She lived for him, and his services, and the brass span new church he had built for himself in the square at the back. She missed never a service, week-days or Sundays; early prayers at uncomfortable hours, when the curates were sleeping and the pew-opener audibly snored; daily sermons, evening services, special services for special out-of-the-way saints, and Sunday services innumerable.

Let it be written here, lest our meaning be misinterpreted, that Harriet Wesden had improved vastly with all this—was a better, more energetic, and devout woman. If she went ~~so~~ often to church—that is quite possible—if she were a trifle "high" and pinned her faith on decorations, if she thought the world all vanity and vexation of spirit, if she were a little proud of carrying outward and visible signs of her own inward and spiritual grace, if she even neglected her father at times—poor old Wesden, who sadly needed cheerful society now—still the end was good, and she was at her best then. Serious people *will* appear a little disagreeable to people who are not serious; but then what do serious people think of their mundane critics, or care for them?

Harriet Wesden fancied that she had set herself apart from the world—that its vanities and belongings scarcely had power to arrest her steady upward progress. It did not strike her that while she remained in the world the sorrows, joys, and histories of its denizens must have power to affect her.

Sidney Hinchford had mistrusted her—the man for whom she had been anxious to make sacrifices had refused them, and discredited their genuineness; her only friend, in whom she thought there could not be a possibility of guile, had supplanted her. From that hour let her set herself apart from them; bear no ill-feeling to-

ward them, but keep to her new world. Her life was not their lives, and they were best away from her. After that set in more strongly the seriousness to which we have alluded, and all former trace of Harriet Wesden's old self submerged for good and all.

Mattie and Harriet met at times; Mattie would not give up the old friend, the girl she had loved so long and faithfully. Despite the new reserve—even austerity—that had suddenly sprung up, Mattie called at regular intervals, took her place between Harriet and Mr. Wesden, and spoke for a while of the old times. Harriet's manner puzzled her, but there seemed no chance of an explanation of it. Her quick observation detected Harriet's new ideas of life's duties, and she did not intrude upon them, or utter one word by way of argument or in opposition. It happened sometimes that Harriet would be absent during Mattie's visits—"gone to church," old Wesden would say, ruefully—and Mattie would take her place by the deserted father's side, and play the part of daughter to him till Harriet's return.

Harriet seldom spoke of Sidney Hinchford to our heroine—he did not belong to her diminished world; she flattered herself that there was no thought of him, or of what might have been, to perplex her with new vanities. When the name of Sidney Hinchford intruded upon the subject of discourse she heard it coldly enough. She was always glad to learn that Sidney was well and doing well; it had even been a relief to her to know that the business, after a stand-still of some months, had taken a turn in the right direction; but when all was what was there to agitate her? If Sidney were ill, and needed her help, she would have taken her place at his side, perhaps; if Mattie were ill even—though in her heart she felt that she did not love Mattie so well as formerly—she would have devoted herself to her service; but they were both well, living under the same roof with Mattie's father, and all things had changed so since Suffolk Street times.

Harriet was from home at her usual devotions, and her father was endeavoring to amuse himself as he best might under the circumstances, when a stranger, who preferred not to give his name, requested an audience of Miss Wesden. Miss Wesden not being at home, Mr. Wesden would do for the nonce, and the stranger was, therefore, shown into the parlor.

The *ci-devant* stationer put on his spectacles, and looked suspiciously at the new-comer. Mr. Wesden was a man of the world, and hard to be imposed upon. A man more nervous and irritable with every day, but having his wits about him, as the phrase runs.

"Good-evening," said the stranger.

"Good-evening," responded Mr. Wesden.

"Ahem! if it's a subscription for any thing, I don't think that I have any thing to give away."

"My name is Hinchford—Maurice Hinchford—possibly better known to you by the unenviable *alias* of Maurice Darcy."

"Oh! you're that vagabond, are you? Well, what do you want? You haven't come to torment my daughter again?" he said, in an excited manner; "you've done enough mischief in your day."

"I am aware of it, Sir. I come to offer every reparation in my power."

"We don't want any of that sort of stuff, Mr. Hinchford."

"It's late in the day to offer an apology—to attempt an explanation of my conduct in the past; but if you would favor me with a patient hearing, I should be obliged, Sir."

"I've nothing better to do," said Mr. Wesden; "take a seat, Sir."

Maurice Hinchford seated himself opposite Mr. Wesden, and commenced his narrative, disguising and extenuating nothing, but attempting to analyze the real motives which had actuated his past conduct—motives which had been a little incomprehensible, taken altogether, and were therefore difficult to make clear before an auditor, as we have seen in our preceding chapter.

Mr. Wesden rubbed the back of his ear, stared hard over Maurice's head at the opposite wall, till Maurice looked behind him to see what was nailed up there; wound up by an emphatic "Humph!" when Maurice had concluded.

"Therefore, you see I was not so very much to blame, Sir—that is, that there were at least extenuating circumstances."

"Were they, though?"

"Why, surely I have proved that?"

"Can't say you have—can't say that I plainly see it at all. But, then, I haven't so clear a head as I used to have—oh! not by a long way!"

"I hope at least you understand that I am heartily ashamed of my past conduct?"

"I am glad to hear that, Sir."

"I have become a different man."

"Been in a reformatory, perhaps?" suggested Mr. Wesden.

"I have found my reformatory in the world."

"Lucky for you."

"And the fact is, that as I have always loved your daughter—as only my own wicked impulse turned your daughter's heart away from me, I have come from abroad with the hope of making all the restitution in my power, by offering her my hand and fortune!"

"Have you, though?"

Mr. Wesden stared harder than ever at this piece of information. Maurice took another glance over his shoulder, and then commenced a second series of explanations, speaking of his position and means, two things to which Mr. Wesden had been never indifferent.

"I don't know that it would be a bad thing for her," said Mr. Wesden; "she never talked to me about her love affairs—girls never do to their fathers—and very likely I haven't understood her all this time."

"Very likely not."

"Perhaps it is about you, and not the other one that has altered her so much. Any nonsense alters a woman, if she dwells upon it."

"Ahem—exactly so."

"You may as well wait till she comes in now," said Mr. Wesden; "that's business."

"Sir, I am obliged to you."

"If you don't mind a pipe I'll think it over myself, and you need not talk any more just at present. We don't have much talk in this house, and you've rather *galled* me, Mr. Hinchford."

"Any commands I will attend to with pleasure."

Maurice Hinchford crossed his arms and sat back in his chair to reflect upon all this; for a

lover he was sad and gloomy—scarcely satisfied with the step which he had taken, and yet brought to it by his own conscience, that had been roused from its inaction by his cousin Sidney. Here a life had been shadowed by his means, and he thought that it was in his power to brighten it; here was good to be done, and he felt that it was his duty at least to attempt the performance of it. Mr. Wesden sat and smoked his pipe at a little distance from him, and revolved in his own mind the strange incident which had flashed athwart the monotony of daily life, and scared him with its suddenness. In Harriet he had probably been deceived, and it was this young man whom she had loved, and whose eccentric courses had rendered her so difficult to comprehend. All the past morbidity, the past variable moods, the fluctuations in her health, were to be laid to this man's charge, and it was well that he had come at last, perhaps. Harriet was a good daughter, an estimable girl, who loved her Bible, and did good to others, but she was not a happy girl. Sorrowful as well as serious, the holiness of her life had not brightened her thoughts or lightened her heart, and was not therefore true holiness, this old man felt assured. Behind the veil there had been something hidden, and it was rather Maurice Hinchford than his blind cousin who stood between her and the light.

"I think you have done right to come," said Mr. Wesden, after half an hour's deliberation.

"I think so, too," was the response.

At the same moment a summons at the door announced Harriet Wesden's return.

"I'll open the door myself, and leave you to explain," he said; "don't move."

Maurice felt tight about the waistcoat now; the romance was coming back again to the latter days; the heroine of it was at the threshold waiting for him. This was a sensation romance, or the roots of his hair would not have tingled so!

Mr. Wesden opened the door for his daughter, and allowed her to proceed half-way down the narrow passage before he gave utterance to the news.

"There has been a visitor waiting for you these last two hours, Harriet."

"For me?" said Harriet, listlessly; and, dreaming not of so strange an intrusion on her home, she turned the handle of the door and entered the parlor. Then she stopped transfixed, scarcely believing her sight, scarcely realizing the idea that it was Maurice Hinchford standing there before her in her father's house.

Maurice had risen.

"I fear that I have surprised you very much, Miss Wesden," said he, hoarsely; "that possibly this was not the best method of once again seeking a meeting with you. This time with your father's consent, at least."

"Sir, I do not comprehend; I can not see that any valid reason has brought you to this house."

"I think it has—I hope it has."

"Impossible!"

"Miss Wesden, I have been relating a long story to your father—may I beg you to listen to me in your turn?"

"If it relate to the past, I must ask you to excuse me," was the cold reply.

"My guilty past it certainly relates to; I pray you for an honest hearing. Ah! Miss Wesden, you are afraid of me, still."

"Afraid!—no, Sir."

Harriet Wesden looked at him scornfully, with a quick, almost an impatient hand removed her bonnet and shawl, and then passed to her father's seat by the table, standing thereat still, by way of hint as to the length of the interview. She was more beautiful than ever; more grave and statuesque, perhaps, but very beautiful. It was the face that he had loved in the days of his wild youth, and it shone before him once again, a guiding star for the future stretching away beyond that little room.

He would have spoken, but she interrupted him.

"Understand me, Mr. Darcy—Mr. Hinchford, I may say now, I presume—I wish to hear no excuses for the past, no explanations of your willful conduct therein; I have done with that and you. If you be here to apologize, I accept that apology, and request you to withdraw. If matters foreign to the past have brought you hither, pray be speedy, and spare me the pain of any longer interview than necessary."

"Miss Wesden, I must, in the first place, speak of the past."

"I will not have it!" cried Harriet, imperiously; "have I not said so?"

The minister round the corner would have rubbed his eyes with amazement at the fire in those of his neophyte. He would have thought the change savored too strongly of the earth from which he and he and other high-pressure members of his flock, had soared just a little above—say a foot and a half, or thereabout.

"It is the past that brings me back to you, Harriet—the past which I would atone for by giving you my name and calling you my wife. I have been a miserable and guilty wretch; I ask you to raise me from my self-abasement by your mercy and your love?"

He moved toward her with all the fire of the old love in his eyes—those eyes which had bewildered her like a serpent's, in the old days. But the spell was at an end, and there was no power to bring her once more to his arms. She recoiled from him with a suppressed scream; her color went and came upon her cheeks; she fought twice with her utterance before she could reply to him.

"Mr. Hinchford, you insult me!"

"No, not that."

"You insult me by your shameless presence here. I told you half a minute ago that I forgave you all the evil in the past. *I don't forgive it*; no true woman ever forgave it yet in her heart. I hate you!"

The minister round the corner would have collapsed at this, as well he might have done. Only that evening had he begged his congregation to love their enemies, and return good for evil, and Harriet Wesden had thought how irresistible his words were, and how apposite his illustrations. And fresh from good counsel, this young woman who had been unmoved for twelve long months, and during that time been about as animate as the Medicean Venns, now told her listener there that she hated him with all her heart!

"Enough, Miss Wesden. I have but to ex-

press my sorrow for the past and take my leave. Forgive at least the motive which has led me to seek you out again."

"One moment! one moment!" said Harriet. She fought with her excitement for an instant, and then with a hand pressed heavily upon her bosom, to still the passionate throbbing there, she said:

"You must not go till I have explained also; you have sought out a girl whose young life you cruelly embittered by your perfidy: let her explain something in defense. Mr. Hinchford, I never loved you; as I stand here, and as this may be my last moment upon earth, I swear that I never loved you in my life! There was a girl's vanity, in the first place—almost a child's vanity, fostered by pernicious teaching of frivolous companions; afterward there was a foolish romantic incertitude—vanity still, perhaps—that led me to trust in you, and to give up one who loved me, and for whom I ought to have died rather than have deserted; but there was no love. I knew it directly that I guessed your cowardice, for I despised you utterly then, and understood the value of the prize my own misconduct had nearly forfeited. I was a weak woman, and you saw my weakness, and hastened to mislead me; but the wrong you would have done me taught me what was right, and, thank God! I was strong enough to save myself. There, Sir, if only to have told you this, I am glad that you have sought an interview. Now, if you are a gentleman—go!"

He hesitated for an instant, as though he could have wished, even in the face of her defiance, to tell his story for the third time; then he turned away, and went slowly out of the room, defeated at all points, his colors lowered and trailing in the dust. Outside he found Mr. Wesden, standing with his back to the street door, smoking his pipe, and regarding the hall mat abstractedly. He looked up eagerly as Maurice Hinchford advanced.

"Well?—well?" he asked, feverishly.

"Yes, it is well," was the enigmatic and gloomy answer; "I see what a fool I have been, Mr. Wesden. I know myself for the first time; good-evening."

Mr. Wesden opened the door for him, and he passed out; the old man watched him for a while, and then returned to his favorite chair in the back-parlor.

Harriet ran to him as he entered, and flung her arms round his neck.

"I have you to love and look to still. Not quite alone—even yet!"

CHAPTER IV.

MORE TALK OF MARRIAGE AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE.

MAURICE HINCHFORD passed away from this story's scene of action. Suddenly and completely he disappeared once more, and they in the humble ranks of life knew nothing of his whereabouts. From Paris his father had received a letter that perplexed and even irritated him, for it was mysterious, and the head of the house of Hinchford detested mystery.

"I have run over here for a week or two—perhaps longer, perhaps less, according to cir-

cumstances," Maurice wrote; "you who are ever indulgent will excuse this flitting, which I will account for on my return. If any thing calls for my especial attention at the bank telegraph to me, and I will come back."

No especial business was likely to demand Maurice's return; the bank went on well without him, good man of business as he was when he set his mind to it. His father's indulgence excused the flitting, though he shook his head over his son's eccentricity, after the receipt of the incomprehensible epistle. "Another of those little weaknesses to which Maurice had been subject," thought the indulgent father; "time he grew out of them now, and married and settled, like other young men of his age. If he would only sow his wild oats, what an estimable man and honored member of society he would be. Poor Maurice!"

Sidney Hinchford, who, from his cousin's hints, had anticipated a second visit from Maurice, felt even a little disappointed at his non-appearance. Sidney was curious; he would have liked to know the result of Maurice's proposal to Harriet Wesden, but he kept his curiosity to himself, and did not even mention to Mattie the advice which he had bestowed upon his cousin. He knew how the matter had ended well enough; Maurice was in earnest, and would beat down all doubts of his better nature developing itself at last; the old love-story would be resumed, and all would go merry as a marriage bell with those two. He congratulated himself upon having done some good even at the eleventh hour, in having helped to promote the true happiness of the girl he had once loved.

Once loved!—yes, he was sure that passion belonged to the past; that it had died out of inaction, and left him free to act. He was not happy in his freedom; his heart was growing heavier than ever, but he kept that fact back for his friends' sakes, and was to them a faint reflex of the Sidney Hinchford whom they had known in better days.

He fell no longer into gloomy reveries; he took part in the conversation of the hour; there came now and then a pleasant turn of speech to his lips; a laugh with him—the old rich, hearty laugh—was not a very rare occurrence; he believed himself resigned to his affliction, content with his position, and for many mercies that had been vouchsafed unto him he was truly grateful.

How to show his gratitude did not perplex him; he had made up his mind after Ann Packet had given him a piece of hers—he had watched for words, signs, sighs—he was only biding his time to speak. But he remained in doubt; it was difficult to probe to the depths; he was a blind man, and far from a clever one; he could only guess by sounds, and test all by Mattie's voice, and he was, therefore, still unsettled.

He resolved to end all, at last, in a quiet and methodical manner, befitting a man like him. He was probably mistaken; he had no power to make any one happy; his confession might dissolve the partnership between Mr. Gray and himself—for how could Mattie and he live in the same house together after his avowal and rejection?

But he had made up his mind, and he went to work in his old straightforward way one evening

when Mattie was absent and Mr. Gray was busy at his work beside him.

"Mr. Gray," said he, "I want to bespeak your sole attention for a few minutes."

"Certainly, Sidney," was the reply. "Shall I put my work away?"

"If you do not mind, for a while."

"There, then!"

Sidney was some time beginning, and Mr. Gray said:

"It's about the business; you're tired of it?"

"On the contrary, I am pleased with it, and the work it throws in my way. But don't you find me a little bit of a nuisance always here?"

"You know better than that. Next to my daughter do you hold a place in my heart."

"Thank you. Now have you ever thought of me marrying?"

"Of you marrying!" he echoed, in a surprised tone that was somewhat feigned. "Why, whom are you to marry, Sid?"

"Mattie, if she'll have me."

The lithographer rubbed his hands softly together—it was coming true at last, this dream of Mattie and his own!

"If she'll have you!" he echoed again. "Well, you must ask her that."

"Do you think she'll have me—a blind fellow like me? Is it quite right that she should even?"

"I don't know—I have often thought about that," said Mr. Gray, forgetting his previous expression of astonishment. "I don't see where the objection is, exactly, Sidney. You're not like most blind men, dulled by your affliction—and Mattie is very different from most girls. If she thought that she could do more good by marrying you, make you more happy, she would do it."

"I don't want a sacrifice—I want to make her happy," said Sidney, a little peevishly. "If she could not love me, as well as pity me, I wouldn't marry her for all the world."

"You must ask her, young friend, not me, then."

"But you do not refuse your consent?"

"No. My best wishes, young man, for your success with the dearest, best of girls. I" laying his hand on Sidney's shoulder for a moment, "don't wish her any better husband."

Sidney had not exhibited any warmth of demeanor in breaking the news to Mr. Gray; many men might have remarked his quiet way of entering upon the subject. But Mr. Gray was of a quiet, unworldly sort himself, and took Sidney's love for granted. How was it possible to know Mattie, to live beneath the same roof with her, and not love her very passionately?

"I think—mind, I only think—that Mattie will not refuse you, Sidney," said Mr. Gray; "she understands you well, and knows thoroughly your character. It's an unequal match, remembering all the by-gones, perhaps; but you are not likely to taunt her with them, or to think her any the worse for them, knowing what she really is in these days, thanks to God!"

"Taunt her!—good Heaven!"

"Hush! that's profane. And the match is not very unequal, considering the help you need and what a true comforter she will be to you. We Grays are of an origin lost in obscurity; you Hinchfords come of a grand old stock; you don't consider this?"

"Not a bit."

"Nor I. But then men who don't spring from old families are sure to say so. I'm not particularly struck with the advantages of having possessed a forefather who came over with the Conqueror. William the Norman brought over a terrible gang of cut-throats and robbers, and there's not a great deal to one's credit in being connected with that lot."

Sidney laughed.

"I never regarded it in that light before. What an attack on our old gentility!"

"Gentility will not be much affected, Sidney. Have you any thing more to tell me?"

"Nothing now."

"Not that if you marry Mattie the crabbed, disputatious local preacher may stop with you!"

"I hope he will. He has been a good friend to me, and will keep so, for his daughter's sake."

"And for your own, young man. I'll go back to my work now."

But the work was in his way after that, and all the effects of his strong will could not make it endurable. Sidney's revelation had disturbed his work; he would try a little silent praying to himself—a selfish prayer he felt it was, and therefore no sound escaped him—that this disclosure of Sidney's might bring comfort and happiness to his daughter and himself.

He was sitting with his large-veined hands spread before his face, and Sidney was wrapt in thoughts of the change that might be in store for him, when Mattie knocked at the door.

"Sit here—I shan't come back yet a while. We may as well end this part of the business at once."

Mattie entered, found her father busy behind the counter with his stock, said a few words, and passed into the parlor.

It was a second version of the proceedings at Camberwell. The father holding aloof, and giving suitor and maiden fair play.

CHAPTER V.

MATTIE'S ANSWER.

SIDNEY HINCHFORD heard the door open, and knew that the end was come. In a few minutes was to be decided the tenor of his after-life. He did not move, but remained with his hands clasped upon the table—a grave and silent figure in the lamp-light.

"What makes you so thoughtful to-night, Sid?"

The more formal Mr. Sidney had been dropped long since; Mattie had resisted the encroachment as long as it was in her power; but the friendship between them had been increased as well as their intimacy, and the more familiar designation was the more natural of the two.

"Am I looking very thoughtful, then, Mattie?"

"Oh! so cross and black!"

"Black?—eh!" he repeated; "that's a singular color to seize upon a man's countenance when he is agitated and hopeful. Come and sit here by my side, Mattie, and hear what news I have wherewith to startle you."

"Not bad news?" she asked.

"You shall judge."

Mattie guessed the purport of the news, and there had been no necessity for her last query. She knew all that was coming now, and so prepared herself for a revelation that she had seen advancing months ago. Months ago she had wondered how she should act on this occasion, what manner she should adopt, and in what way reply to him? She had rehearsed it in her mind, with fear and trembling, and tear-dimmed eyes; she had dreamed of it, and been very happy in her dreams; and now at last she was at fault, and her resources not to be relied on. Very pale, with her mind disturbed, and her heart throbbing, she took her place by his side, shawled and bonneted as she was, and waited for the end.

Sidney broke the ice. The first few words faltered somewhat on his lip, but he gathered nerve as he proceeded, and finally related very calmly—almost too calmly—and plainly the state of his feelings toward her.

"Your father and I have been speaking of you during your absence; I have suggested to him a change of life for myself and you—if you will only consent to sacrifice a life for my sake! A selfish and an inconsiderate request, Mattie, which I should not have thought of, had I not fancied that it was in my power to make you a good husband, a true and faithful husband, and to love you more dearly as a wife than friend. But always understand, Mattie, that on your side it will be a sacrifice—that no after-repentance, only my death, can relieve you from the incubus—that for life you are tied to a blind man, and that all natural positions of life are reversed, when I ask you to be my guide, protector, comforter! Always remember too, Mattie, that without me you will be free and your own mistress; you, a young woman, to whom will come fairer and brighter chances!"

It was an odd manner of proposing; possibly Mattie thought so herself, for she raised her eyes from the ground, and looked at him long and steadily.

"Sidney, have you well reflected on this step?" she asked.

"I have."

"Thought well of the sacrifice of all the past hopes you have had; of the *incubus* that I may be to you some day; that without me you will be free, and your own master—you, to whom the fairer, brighter chance may come when too late? Sidney, we know not what a day may bring forth!"

"My fate is in your hands, Mattie."

"What I have been, you know—you must have thought of lately. What I am now, a poor, plain girl, self-taught and homely, who may shame you with her ignorance, you know too. Sidney, I have dwelt upon this lately; until this night, now I am face to face with the truth, I thought that I had made up my mind."

"To refuse me?"

"No; to accept you. To be your loving wife through life, aiding you, and keeping you from harm; but now I shrink back from my answer."

"Ah," he said, mournfully; "it is natural."

"Not for my own sake," she added, quickly, "but for yours. For your happiness, not mine. Sidney, you have not settled down; you are not resigned to this present lot in life; there is a restlessness which you subdue now you are well and strong, but which may defeat you in the

days to come. Years hence I may be a trouble to you, a regret: you a gentleman's son, and I—a stray! I may have made amends for my past life, but I can not forget it; there will come times when to you and me the memory may be very bitter yet."

"No, no!"

"Sidney, when I was that neglected child I think I had a grateful heart; for I appreciated all the kindness that helped me upward and turned me from the dangerous path I was pursuing. I did not forget one friend who stretched his helping hand toward me: I have remembered them all in my progress, the agents of that good God whose will it was that I should not be lost. Sidney, I would marry you out of gratitude for that past, if I honestly believed you built your happiness upon me; but I could not let you marry me out of gratitude, or think to make me happy by a share of affection that had no real existence. I would do all for you," she said, vehemently; "but you must make no effort to raise me from any motives but your love."

Sidney started—colored. Had he misunderstood Mattie until that day? was he the victim of his own treacherous thoughts after all?—the hope of an illusion which he had hoped to foster by believing in himself?

"Sidney, I will be patient and wait for the love; hope in it advancing nearer and nearer every day; strive for it even, if you will, and it lies in my power. But I am above all charity."

"Mattie, you are not romantic? You do not anticipate from me, in my desolate position, all the passionate protestations of a lover? You will believe that I look forward to you as the wife in whom alone rests the last chance of happiness for me?"

"We can not tell what is our last chance," said Mattie; "it is beyond our foresight; God will give us many chances in life, and the best may not have fallen to your share or mine. Sidney, there *was* a chance of happiness for you once—on which you built, and in which you never thought of me—do you regret that now?" she asked, with a woman's instinctive fear that the old love still lingered in his heart.

"Mattie, I regret nothing in the past. And in the future I am hopeful of your aid and love. Can I say more?"

"Sidney," said Mattie, after a second pause, "I will not give you my answer to-night; I will not say that I will be your wife, for better for worse, until this day month. It is a grave question, and I ought not to decide this hastily. I must think—I *must* think!"

"Ah! Mattie, you don't love me, or it would be easy enough to say 'Yes,'" said Sidney.

"No, not easy."

"I can read my fate—eternal isolation!" he said, gloomily.

"Patience; you can trust me; let me think for a while if I can trust in you. You do not wish my unhappiness, Sid?"

"God forbid!"

"We have been good friends hitherto—brother and sister. For one more month let us keep brother and sister still; there is no danger of our teaching ourselves to love one another less in that period. In that month will you think seriously of me—not of what will make me hap-

py, but what will render you happy, as the fairy books say, forever afterward? Remember that it is forever in this life, and that I am to sit by your side and take that place in your heart which you had once reserved for another; think of all this, and be honest and fair with me."

"I see. You distrust my love. You have no faith in my stability."

"I say nothing, Sidney, but that I feel it would be wrong to answer hastily. Are you offended with my caution?"

"No; God bless you, Mattie! you are right enough."

"This day month I will take my place at your side, and give you truly and faithfully my answer. It is not a long while to wait; we shall have both thought more intently of this change."

She left him, to begin his thoughts anew; her reply had disturbed his equanimity; he neither understood Mattie nor himself just then. What had perplexed him?—what had come over the spirit of his dream to trouble his mind or conscience in so strange a manner?

Mattie went to her room and locked the door upon her thoughts—upon that new wild sense of happiness which she had never known before, and which, despite the character she had assumed—yes, assumed!—she could not keep in the back-ground of that matter-of-fact life, now vanishing away from her. She knew that she had acted for the best in giving him time to think again of the nature of his proposition; in restraining that impulse to weep upon his shoulder, and

feel those strong arms enfolding her to his breast. The old days had startled her when he had spoken in so firm and hard a manner; that figure of the past which had been all to him fitted there still, and held her back, and stood between herself and him, despite the new happiness she felt, and which no past could wholly scare away.

She believed in her own coming happiness; that he would love her better for the delay—understand more fully why she hesitated. When the time came to answer "Yes!" she would explain all that had perplexed her, arrested her assent midway, and filled her with the fears of his want of love for her, his future discontent when irrevocably bound to her. Twice in life now he had offered his hand in marriage; twice had the answer been deferred, for reasons unakin to each other. It was singular; but this time all would end happily. He would love her with his whole heart, as he had loved Harriet Wesden, and she would be his proud and happy wife, cheering his prospects, elevating his thoughts, doing her best to throw across his darkened life a gleam or two of sunshine, in which he might rejoice.

She was very happy—for the doubts that had kept her answer back went farther and farther away as she dwelt upon all this. There was a restless beating at her heart which robbed her of calmness for a while; but it was not for that precipitated its action, and the noises in her ear might be the distant clash of marriage bells, which she had never dreamed would ring for him and her!

BOOK VIII

MORE LIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW HOPE.

WHETHER Sidney Hinchford gave much ulterior thought to his proposal is a matter of some doubt. He had made up his mind before his conversation with Mr. Gray and daughter, and had there been no real love in his heart he would not have drawn back from his offer. His life apart from business was akin to his business life in that; reflection on what was best, just, and honorable, and then his decision, which no adverse fate was ever afterward to shake. He did not believe in any motive force that could keep him from a purpose—it was a vain delusion, unworthy of a Hinchford!

On the morning of the following day the cousin of whom he had thought more than once entered again upon the scene of action; at an early hour, when Mattie was busy in the shop, and Mr. Gray was absent on a preaching expedition. Maurice Hinchford's first inquiry was if Mr. Gray were within, and very much relieved in mind he appeared to be upon receiving the information that that formidable Christian was not likely to be at home till nightfall. Maurice did not come unattended; he brought a friend with him, whom he asked to wait in the shop for a while, while he exchanged a few words with Sidney.

Mattie looked at the stranger, a tall, lank man, with an olive face, and long black hair, which he tucked in at the back between his coat and waistcoat in a highly original manner. He was a man who took no interest in passing events, but sat "all of a heap" on that high chair which had been Maurice Hinchford's stool of repentance, carefully counting his fingers to make sure that he had not lost any coming along.

"Good-morning, Sidney," said Maurice, on entering. "Not lost yet, old fellow!"

"Good-morning, Maurice."

"I have brought the latest news—I have been abroad since my last visit here."

"Abroad again?"

"I'll tell you about that presently. If you're not too busy this morning, and I'm not too unwelcome an intruder, I should be glad to inform you how I fared by following your advice."

"You are not unwelcome, Maurice, though I can not say that there is any great amount of pleasure experienced by your visit to me."

"Still cold—still unapproachable, after forgiving all the past!"

"But not forgetting, Maurice. You bring the past in with you—I hear it in every accent of your voice; all the figures belonging to it start forth like spectres to dismay me."

"Your past has no reproaches—what is it to mine?"

"A regret is as keen as a reproach."

"Ah! you regret the past!—some act in it, perhaps?" said Maurice, with curiosity.

"We should scarcely be mortal if we could look back without regrets, I think."

"Ah! but what is the keenest—bitterest?"

"That is a leading question, as the lawyers say."

"Then I'll not press it—I'll speak of my own regrets instead. I regret having followed your advice, Sidney."

"We are all liable to err—I meant it for the best."

"I called the following evening on Harriet Wesden—I offered her my hand, as an earnest of that affection which only needed her presence to revive again—I asked pardon for my past, and spoke of my atonement in the future. Could I do more?"

"No."

Sidney was nervously anxious to learn the result, but he merely compressed his lips, and waited for the sequel. He would not ask how this had ended—his pride held back his curiosity.

"And she refused me, as you and I might have expected, had we more seriously considered the matter. By George, I shall never forget her fiery eyes, her angry gestures, her contempt, which seemed withering me up—I knew that it was all over with every shadow of hope, then."

"A man should never despair."

"It would be difficult to help it in the face of that clencher, Sidney. Well, it served me right; I might have expected it; I might have guessed the truth had I given it a moment's thought; but I put my trust in you, Sidney, and a nice mess I have made of it! Upon my honor, I would rather bear two—say three—of Mr. Gray's sermons than face Harriet Wesden again."

"Still, you should not be sorry at having offered all the reparation in your power."

"Well, now I come to think of it, Sidney, I'm not sorry. To confess the real plain truth, I'm glad."

"Indeed!"

"Because I have made a discovery, and if you're half a Hinchford you'll profit by the hint. Harriet Wesden loves you."

Sidney's hands grappled the arms of his chair, in which he half rose, and then sat down again. The red blood mounted to his face, even those dreamy eyes flashed fire again—the avowal was too decided and uncompromising not to affect him.

"I do not wish to dwell upon this topic."

"Ah! but I do. It has been bothering me all the way to Paris—all the way back. I have been building fancy castles concerning it. I have been one gigantic, unmitigated schemer since I saw you last, planning for a happiness which is yours by a word, and which you deserve, Sid Hinchford. I feel that your life might be greatly changed, and that it is in your power to effect it."

"Were it my wish it is too late. As it is not my wish—as I do not believe you," he added, bluntly—"as I have outlived my youthful follies, and am sober, serious, and unromantic—as I have made my choice, and know where my happiness lies, I will ask you not to pain me—not to torture me by a continuance of this subject."

"Let me just give you a sketch of what she said to me."

"I will hear no more!" he cried, with an impatient stamp of his foot.

"I have done," said Maurice; "subject deferred *sine die*—or tied round the neck with a big stone, and sunk forever in the waters of oblivion. By George, Sid! that's a neat phrase, isn't it?—only it reminds one of drowning a puppy. And now to business."

"What more?" asked Sidney, curtly.

His cousin had annoyed him—stirred up the acrimony of his nature, and destroyed all that placidity of demeanor which he had fostered lately. He felt that he rather hated Maurice Hinchford again—that his cousin was ever a dark blot in the landscape, with his robust health, loud voice, and self-sufficiency. This man paraded his own knowledge of human nature too obtrusively, and spoke as if his listener was a child; he professed to have discerned in Harriet Wesden an affection for the old lover to whom she had been engaged—as if he, Sidney Hinchford, had been blind all his life, or was morally blind then! Sidney would be glad to hear the last of him—to be left to himself once more; his cousin was an intrusion—he desired no further speech with him, and he implied as much by his last impatient query.

"It's something entirely new, Sidney, and therefore you need not fear any old topics being intruded on your notice. I have brought a friend to see you."

"Take him away again."

"No, I'd rather not, thank you," was the aggravating response; "I made my mind up to bring him, and he's waiting in the shop."

"Maurice—you insult me!"

"Pardon me, cousin, but the end must justify the means. He has come from Paris to see you; he would have been here before had not illness prevented him."

"Who is this man?"

"The cleverest man in Europe, I'm told—an eccentric being, with a wonderful mine of cleverness beneath his eccentricity. A man who has made the defects of vision his one study, and has become great in consequence. Sidney, you must see him!"

"You bring him here at your own expense to inspect a hopeless case; you will shame me by being beholden to you—to you of all men in the world!"

"I thought we had got over the past—forgiven it?"

"Yes, but—"

"But it can't be forgiven, Sid Hinchford, if you hinder me making an effort to atone to you in my way."

"With your purse?" was the cold reply.

"No; with my respect for you—my regret for a friend whom I have lost."

"A strange friend!"

"And I have faith in this man. I remember a case similar to yours, which—"

"Stop! in the name of mercy, Maurice; this can not be borne at least. I am resigned to despair, but not to such a hope as yours. Let him come in, and laugh at you for your folly in bringing him hither."

"Bario!" called Maurice.

The lank man came into the parlor, set his hat on a chair, and looked at Sidney very intently. His vacuity of expression vanished, and a keen intelligence took its place.

"Good-morning, Sir," he said, in fair English; "you are the blind gentleman Mr. Hinchford has requested me to see?"

"The same, Sir."

"You are sure you're blind?"

"Maurice, this man is a—"

"Yes, very clever. You have heard of Dr. Bario?—he has been resident in Paris some years now."

"Ah!" said Sidney, listlessly.

"There is a blindness that be not blindness, Sir; that's my theory," said the Italian; "a something that comes suddenly like a blight—the offspring of much excitement, very often."

"Mine had been growing upon me for years; I was prepared for it by a man as skillful as yourself."

"May I put to you his name?"

Sidney told him, and Dr. Bario gave his shoulders that odious French shrug which implies so much. Such is the jealousy of all professions, extending even to the disciples of the healing art. "A never thinks much of B, if he be jumping at the same prize on the bay-tree; Dr. Bario had his weakness."

"He might have mistaken the disease, and into this have half-frightened you. People odd mistakes do make at times; I myself have not been infallible."

"Possibly not," said Sidney, dryly.

"In my youth, of course," said the vain man, "when I listened a little too much to the opinions of others—it was once my way."

Sidney thought the speaker had altered considerably since then, but kept his idea to himself. He was endeavoring to be cool, and uninfluenced by this man's remarks; but they had set his heart beating, and his temples painfully throbbing. He was a fool to feel unnerved at this; it was a false step of his cousin's, and had given him much pain; but Maurice had meant well, and he forgave him even then.

"Do you mind turning just one piece more to the light?" asked the doctor.

Sidney turned like an automaton. Maurice drew up the back-parlor blind; the doctor bent over his patient, and there was a long silence—an anxious pause in the action of three lives, for the doctor's interest was as acute as the cousin's.

"Well?" Maurice ejaculated at last.

"There's a chance, I think."

"A chance of sight!" cried Sidney; "do you mean that?—is it possible that you can give me hope of that—now?"

"I don't give hope, Sir," said Dr. Bario; "it's a chance, that's all—every thing. It's one nice case for me, not you, young man."

"What do you mean?"

"There's danger in it: it's light, death, or madness! I do not you advise to risk this; but there's one chance if you do!"

"I will chance it!"

He was not content with the present, then; it had been a false placidity; he would risk his life for light; life without it, even with Mattie, did not seem for an instant worth considering!

"Very good. To-morrow I will you send for; you will have to place yourself entire under my direction for more weeks than one, before the final operation be attempted."

"I agree to every thing. May I accompany you now?"

"To-morrow," was the answer again.

"Oh! it will never come. Maurice," he said, offering his hand, "however this ends, I am indebted to you."

"Yes—but—but if it end badly?"

"It will be God's will."

"And if it end as I hope and trust, as I fancy it will, Sid, then you must pay that debt, or I'll never forgive you."

"In what way can I ever repay it?"

"By taking your old place at the banker's desk, and showing me that the past is really forgiven."

"I will do that if—ah! what a mighty If this is!"

"Keep hopeful—not nervous, above all the things," said the doctor; "if you fear, it must not be attempted."

With this final warning the doctor and Maurice withdrew. Maurice left the doctor to whisper confidentially to Mattie.

"Miss Gray, I have brought a skillful oculist to look at my cousin Sid. He reports not altogether unfavorably; he gives us hope. Sid will go away with us to-morrow."

"Go away!"

"Yes, to submit himself for a week or two to Dr. Barrio's treatment; he says that he will chance the danger, and I think he's right. Keep him strong and hopeful, Miss Gray; much depends upon that."

"Yes—yes," gasped Mattie.

She had not recovered her astonishment when the visitor had left the shop. "Hope for Sidney!"—"going away!"—"keep him strong!"—was all this a dream?

"Mattie," called Sidney from the parlor, and our heroine rushed in at once and found our hero walking up and down the room with a freer step than she had witnessed in him since his blindness.

"Mattie," he said, in an agitated voice, "he tells me that there is a chance of the light coming back to me; a chance that entails danger, but which is surely worth the risk. Think of the daylight streaming in upon my darkened senses, and my waking up once more to life!"

"I am so glad!—I am so very glad!" cried Mattie; adding the instant afterward, "but the—the danger? What is that?"

"A danger of death, or of my going mad, he left it doubtful which; I don't care which; I can risk all for the one chance ahead of me. I will keep strong, praying for the brightness of the new life."

"Yes," was the mournful response. In that brightness one figure might at least grow dim: in the darkness he had learned to love her, he said. But he was not thinking of love then, or of her whose love he had sought: a new hope was bewildering him, and he could not escape it.

"Keep him strong and hopeful," had been the caution given Mattie; there was no need for it. He *was* hopeful, far too hopeful, of the sunshine. He thought nothing of the danger, or of a world a hundred times worse than that of his benighted one; and he was strong in faith. He could talk of nothing else, and Mattie made no effort to distract his mind away from it. It was natural enough that he should forget her for a while. The time had not come for her to answer him, or to judge him. He had said that his mind was made up, and that she possessed his love. Surely they were earnest words enough to keep her hopeful in her turn.

And if the change in Sidney did result in Sidney's cure she would rejoice in it with all her heart—as his father would have rejoiced had he lived and known the troubles of his boy.

The next day Maurice Hinchford arrived in his father's carriage to take Sidney away. Sidney was equipped for departure, and had been waiting for his cousin the last two hours, agitating his mind with a hundred reasons for the delay.

The carriage at the door, and the evidence of wealth in Sidney's relations, made Mattie's heart sink somewhat; his would be a world so different from hers forever after this!

Mattie faced Maurice before he entered the parlor. She had been watching for him also that day, and now arrested his progress.

"Mr. Hinchford, you did me harm once; you were sorry at a later day that it was not in your power to make amends. Will you now?"

"Willingly."

"Let me know when Sidney runs his greatest risk—give me fair warning of it, that his friends may be near him. If there be a risk of death he must not die without me there. You promise?"

"I promise, Miss Gray."

Mattie had no further request to urge, and he, after avoiding Mr. Gray by a strategic movement, and a hurried "Good-day, Sir—hope you're well!" entered the parlor with the words,

"Ready, Sid?"

Sidney Hinchford took his friend's arm, Maurice signed to the footman at the door to carry Sidney's portmanteau, and then the two cousins entered the shop—both looking strangely alike, arm in arm and shoulder to shoulder thus.

"One moment, Maurice."

Sidney thought of Mattie at the last. In his own anxiety for self he did not forget her, as she had feared he would.

"Where's Mattie?"

"Here, Sidney."

He drew her aside—away out of hearing, where neither Mr. Gray nor his cousin could listen to his grateful words.

"Mattie, dear," he said, "I know that I shall have your prayers for my success—you, who have fought my battles, and been always ready at my side. Pray for our bright future together; it will come now. Whatever happens you and I together in life, my girl, unless with that month's reflection that I granted you comes the want of trust in my sincerity."

"Never that, Sidney."

"Good-by!"

He stooped and kissed her, and Mattie shrank not away from him, though it was the first time in his life that his lips had touched hers. He

was going away from that house forever, perhaps; they might never know each other again; and she loved him too dearly, and felt too happy in those fleeting moments, to feel abashed at this evidence of his affection.

So they parted, and Ann Packet, who had heard the story, rushed from the side door to fling a shoe for luck after the receding carriage. A maniacal act that the footman—who had not heard the story—was unable to account for, save as a personal insult to himself.

"He had gone out of his spear to a place called Peckham," he said afterward in the servants' hall, "and had had old boots flung at him by the lower borders!"

CHAPTER II.

MATTIE IS TAKEN INTO CONFIDENCE.

SIDNEY's departure made a difference in the house; it was scarcely home without him now. Mattie and Mr. Gray took their usual places after the day's business was over, and looked somewhat blankly at each other. The father had become attached to Sidney, as well as the daughter; he was nervous as to the result of the mysterious system under which his son by adoption had placed himself.

He had no faith in cures effected by men who were not of the true faith—whatever that might mean in Mr. Gray's opinion—he would have liked to see this Dr. Bario himself, and sound him as to his religious convictions. If he were a Roman Catholic Sidney's chance of success was very small, he thought.

Mattie did not take this narrow view of things; but she was anxious and dispirited. Anxious for Sidney and the result—dispirited at a something else which she could scarcely define. Sidney's last words were ringing in her ears, but there was no comfort in them now; they were meant to encourage, but they only perplexed; all was mystery beyond. She prayed that Sidney would be well and strong again, but she felt that her happiness—her best days—would lie further off when the light came back to him. It might be fancy; the best days might be advancing to her as well as to Sidney Hinchford, but the instinctive feeling of a great change weighed upon her none the less heavily.

She did not feel in suspense about a serious result to Sidney; Sidney would get better, she thought, and the shadow of a darker life for him did not fall heavily athwart her musings.

When those whom we love are away we are full of wonder concerning them; speculations on their acts in the distance bridge over the dreary space between us and them. "I wonder what they are doing now!" and the suggestions that follow this while away a great share of the time that would seem dull and objectless without them. You who are loved and are away from us, do justice to our thoughts of you, and keep worthy of the fancy pictures wherein ye are so vividly portrayed!

A week after Sidney's departure Maurice Hinchford appeared once more in the neighborhood of Peckham. This was in the afternoon, and he had reached Peckham in the morning, and therefore wasted a considerable portion of

the day. But then Mr. Gray had been at home in the morning, and it had struck Maurice that that gentleman's excitable temperament would not allow of a long sojourn indoors, with no one to preach to but his daughter. He would not chance meeting Mr. Gray yet a while; he would wait and watch.

Mr. Gray really found it dull work that afternoon, and business being slack he started immediately after his dinner in search of a convert of whom he had heard in the neighborhood of his chapel. Maurice, who had noted him turn the corner of the street, uttered a short prayer of thanks, and crossed over to the stationer's shop.

Mattie turned very pale at the first sight of Maurice.

"I am wanted—and, oh dear, my father has just gone out!"

"No, you are not wanted yet a while, Miss Gray. Pray compose yourself, I bring you very little news."

"Sidney—he is well?"

"Very well; Dr. Bario has not given him notice to prepare for the great experiment yet a while," said Maurice; "but I thought that you might be anxious about him, Miss Gray, and that any little news might be acceptable."

"You are very kind; yes, any news of Sidney is ever most acceptable."

"Even from such a scamp as I am?" he said, with his eyes twinkling.

"Sidney has forgiven you—that is enough, Sir."

"Ah! but yours was a left-handed wrong, and the heaviest share of it might have fallen to your lot."

"But it has not. Pray don't talk of it again."

"All's well that ends well," said Maurice, taking his seat on the high chair on the shop side of the counter, facing our heroine; "and if it has ended in my doing no harm, and turning out a better fellow myself, why there's not much to regret. And you would not believe to what an extraordinary pitch of excellence I am attaining."

"I shall believe nothing if you jest, Sir."

"It was not a jest; I've a way of talking like that."

"It's a very stupid way."

"Is it, though?—well, perhaps you're right enough."

Mattie wondered what he was staying for; was even still a little nervous that he had something more to communicate concerning Sidney. But he continued talking in this new desultory way, and remained on his perch there, observant of customers, the goods they purchased, and the remarks they made, and showing no inclination to depart. He rendered Mattie fidgety after a while, for he was in a fidgety humor himself, and tilted his chair backward and forward, and examined every thing minutely on the counter, dropping an article or two on the floor, and endeavoring to pick it up with his varnished boots, à la Miss Biffin.

"Does this business answer, Miss?" he asked at last.

"It is improving—I think it will answer."

"Rather slow for old Sid, it must have been."

"We did our best to make him happy here, Sir; I think that we succeeded."

"My dear Miss Gray, I do not doubt that, for

an instant!" Maurice hastened to apologize; "more than that, Sidney has told me the same himself. But was he happy?"

"Have you any reason to think otherwise?" was Mattie's quick, almost suspicious question.

"Scarcely a reason, perhaps. Still I don't think that he was happy."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Mr. Hinchford."

"He tried to feel as happy as you wished to make him, but I think he failed. Under the circumstances, heavily afflicted as he was, you must own that that was natural."

"I own that."

"But his mind was never at ease—there was much to perplex it. Now, Miss Gray," leaning over the counter very earnestly, "let me ask you if you honestly believe that he has given up every thought of making Harriet Wesden his wife?"

"Every thought of it, I think he has."

"You and he have been like brother and sister together, and the truth must have escaped him," said Maurice, doubtfully; "or you are less quick-witted than somehow I have given you credit for. You would promote his true happiness, Miss Gray, by every means in your power, I am sure?"

"Yes," answered Mattie.

"Then you and I acting together might bring about that match between them yet."

"You and I acting together for that purpose!" Mattie ejaculated. She clutched the counter with her nervous fingers, and regarded Maurice Hinchford attentively; she was no longer doubtful of that man's visit to her; he had come to steal her Sidney away—to teach her, by his indirect assertions, that it was better to resign her thoughts of happiness rather than mar his cousin's.

"There only requires one fair meeting between them—one candid explanation of what was false, and what was true—to show each to the other in a better light. This is my object in life now—I have done harm to those two—I will do good if I can!"

"You speak as though you were certain of the success of Dr. Bario's remedies."

"I am perfectly certain, Miss Gray! Dr. Bario is certain too—although he speaks of the risk, and of the hundredth chance against him, rather than of the ninety and nine in his favor. That's his way."

"Suppose him successful, and Sidney well again—what are we to do?" asked the curious Mattie.

She was anxious to sift this theory to the bottom—to know upon what facts, or fancies, Maurice Hinchford based his cruel idea. She spoke coolly and sisterly now; no evidences of intense excitement was likely to betray her again that day. On the inner heart had shut, with a clang which vibrated still within her, the iron gates of her inflexible resolve.

"First of all, let me ask you a question. You have lived with Miss Wesden—you understand her—you have loved her. You can assure me that there was no doubt of her affection for him being true and fervent?"

"There was no doubt of that."

"I can answer for the present time."

"You can?" said Mattie. She spoke very

quickly, but her heart leaped into her throat for an instant, and took away her breath.

"Miss Wesden confessed to me, only a week back, that she loved Sidney Hinchford still."

"Impossible!"

"You doubt my word, Miss Gray. Why should I attempt to deceive you?"

"What possible object could she have in telling you that?"

"I made her an offer of marriage," said Maurice, coolly, "and she rejected me. She did not scruple to confess to me her reasons; she was excited I must own, and, therefore, thrown off her guard."

"What did she say?"

"That she had never loved me, and that she would have died for Sidney. That it was all my fault—my wickedness—which had parted them."

"A singular confession for her to make," said Mattie, thoughtfully; "all my life I have been endeavoring to find the truth—the whole truth—and have always failed."

"You were not the confidante that I believed, then?"

"Harriet Wesden and I loved each other very dearly—in our hearts there is no difference yet. For my sake, were I in danger, she would do much."

"And for her sake—what would you do?"

"Every thing."

"Well spoken," cried Maurice, heartily; "I knew that I was not deceived in you."

"She is unhappy and loves Sidney. Sidney is unhappy and loves her, you think. It is a story of the truth of which we must be certain in the first place."

"Yes, and then?"

"Then we will do our best—God willing," murmured Mattie.

"I rely upon you, Miss Gray; I am obliged by the evidences of interest in those two old lovers, parted by mistake. Both very unhappy, and both with a chance of being happy together, there is no difficulty in guessing where our duty lies."

"No."

"Think of the gratitude of those two in the days when we have helped to clear the mists away, Miss Gray. The last chapter in the novel, the last scene in the five-act comedy, where the stern parent joins the hands of the happy couple, will be nothing to the glorious ending of *our* story. Boundless gratitude to you, full forgiveness for me, and all going merry as a marriage bell. Miss Gray, I engage your hand for the first dance in the evening—we'll wind up with a ball that day—is it a bargain between us?"

"I make no hasty promises," said Mattie, with a faint smile.

"Well, there will be time to talk of that idea," said Maurice, laughing; "and, talking about time, how I have been absorbing yours, to be sure! Still time is well wasted when it is employed for others' happiness; your father could offer no objection to that sentiment. You are on my side?"

"On Sidney's, if he think of Harriet Wesden still."

"If—why, haven't I proved it?—did you not say that you believed every word?"

"No, I did not say that. It—it is true, perhaps—I shall know better presently. Sir, I will find out the truth."

"It will be easy for an acute woman to discover the truth both in Sidney and Harriet; for the truth—for the better days, we are all waiting. Good-by."

"Good-by, Sir; that promise to give me warning of the day which will be life or death to Sidney—you will not forget?"

"I never forget, Miss Gray. Rely upon me."

Maurice Hinchford departed, full of his hope, dreaming not of the despair that he had left behind in the heart of that simple-minded woman. He had intended all for the best; he had known nothing of Sidney's proposal to Mattie; he had relied on Mattie's sisterly affection for the man and woman in whose happiness he was deeply interested. He went on his way rejoicing—proud of the new volunteer he had enlisted in his cause, and sanguine as to a result which should bring peace to every one.

Mattie sat behind the counter in her old position after Maurice Hinchford had left her—rigid and motionless. This was the turning-point of her life—the ordeal under which she would harden or utterly give way. A customer entering the shop waited and stared and wondered at the silent figure which faced him and took no heed of his presence—at her who was finally roused to everyday life by his direct appeal to her. Mattie served him, then dropped into her chair again, and the old stony look settled once more upon her face.

Fate was before her, and she rebelled against it; the whole truth—hard and cruel—she could not believe in. "It's not true!" her white lips murmured; "it's false, as he is! He has heard from Sidney all that Sidney purposes, and is alarmed for the honor of his family. I see it all now—a plot against me!" But "was it true?" sounded in her ears like a far-off echo, from which she could not escape.

It was a desperate struggle, and she was fighting that silent, intense battle still when her father returned. Hours ago she had prayed that he might come back soon, and end that weary watch there; suffer her to escape to her own room, and lock the door upon that world upon which the mists were stealing. But when he returned she did not go away from him; a horror of being alone and giving way like a child kept her at her post there, answering and inwardly defying all suspicious questions.

"You're very white, Mattie. Has any thing happened?" asked her father.

"Sidney's cousin has been here. Sidney is well and hopeful."

"Good hearing. He will be back in the midst of us before we know where we are. Mattie, I'm sure you have a headache?"

"A little one; nothing to complain about."

"Why don't you go for a walk? It's not very late. What a time it is since you have seen Mr. Weeden!"

"I will go there."

Mattie sprang to her feet.

"Yes, I will go—at once."

Mattie ran up stairs, quickly dressed herself, gave one frightened glance at her own face in the dressing-glass, and then hurried down stairs away from the silence wherein she could not trust herself.

"I am going now," she said, and hurried away.

Mr. Gray was disturbed by Mattie's eagerness to depart, but explained it by the rules he considered most natural.

"She is unsettled by Sid's absence—by the danger he is in. Well, there's nothing remarkable in that."

He took his work into the shop and devoted himself to it, in the leisure that his customers—few and far between after nightfall—afforded him. When the shutters were up before the windows, and the gas turned low, he stood at the door waiting for Mattie, who was late, and speculating as to the advisability of proceeding in search of her.

Mattie came swiftly toward him while he watched. She had been trying to outwalk her thoughts, and failed; the odds were against her.

"Ah! that is you, Mattie. How are they?"

"Well. I did not see Miss Wesden. She was not at home."

"All the time with that old man?" he said, with a little of his past weakness developing itself.

"We have been speaking of old times—and Harriet. Oh dear! I am very tired. May I go up to my room at once?"

"If you will; but supper is ready, Mattie."

"Not any for me. Good-night."

Mattie thought that she had made good her escape, but she was mistaken; on the stairs Ann Packet had been waiting to waylay her, and to talk of the little events of that day—any talk whatever, so that she saw Mattie for a while after the day's labor was ended. Mattie was considerate even in her distress; she stood on the stairs listening to Ann's rambling accounts of minor things, waiting for the end of the narrative, and only expressing her weariness by a little quivering sigh now and then.

After the story there was Ann Packet to hold the candle closer to her face, and see a change in Mattie also. Mattie had feared this—knowing Ann's vigilance—but there was the old plea of a headache to urge, and all the old recipes of which Ann Packet had ever heard for the headache to listen to. Ann Packet knew an old woman of her work-house days who had had "drefful headaches," and this was how she cured hers—and off went Ann Packet into more rambling incoherencies.

All things have an end. Mattie was free at last. At last the door locked, and the room she had longed for, feared, and longed for again, engulfing her. Mattie took off her bonnet, opened noiselessly the window for the air which she felt she needed, and then dropped into a chair, and looked out at the dark sky, and the bright stars that were shimmering up there, where all seemed peace.

The battle was not over, and Mattie was unconvinced still.

"Is it true?" she asked again; "is it all true?"

CHAPTER III.

HALF THE TRUTH.

MATTIE, as we are already aware, had found Mr. Weeden the sole occupant of that house in Camberwell, whither the stationer had retired from the stirring business of life. He was alone,

dull and dispirited; Harriet had gone to a thanksgiving festival at her favorite church, and her father, whom night-air affected now, was left to read his newspaper, or to think of old times, as his inclination might suggest.

Harriet always offered to remain at home to keep her father company; but old Wesden was not a selfish man; he offered no objection to her departure; it would do her good, and be a change for her. It had long ago suggested itself to him that there was nothing like change to keep Harriet well and all unpleasant thoughts away from her; and if it were only the mild excitement of religious change, it was better than brooding at home over events which had passed and left marks of their ravages.

Mr. Wesden brightened up at Mattie's visit; he had put away his pipe, and was sitting with his feet on the fender and his hands on his knees, thinking of his daughter and of the chance she had lost in not marrying Maurice Hinchford, when Mattie intruded on his reverie.

The old friends—friends who had quarreled and made it up, and become the best of friends again—sat down together and talked of the past, of what a business that was in Suffolk Street once, slow, and sure, and money-getting. Mr. Wesden was inclined to talk more in his old age, Mattie fancied, and when he drifted to the usual subject with which all topics invariably ended—his daughter—Mattie did not stop him.

She had come to find out the truth, if possible—to make sure! Next to Sidney Hinchford stood Harriet Wesden in her regard; she remembered all that Harriet had been to her, all that impulsiveness of action combined with steadiness of love which had won Mattie toward her in the early days, and was not likely to turn her from her then.

But the truth had been hard to arrive at; Mr. Wesden spoke of Harriet's new pursuits, of her indignation at Maurice Hinchford's offer; he could tell her little more than Maurice Hinchford had done, save that there were times when his daughter seemed very dull and thoughtful.

"P'raps it's the church, Mattie," he had said: "I wish you'd come more often and talk to her, like—like you used."

"She does not think that I have neglected her—forgotten her?"

"Oh no!"

"When I meet her here she seems very different to me—almost cold at times," said Mattie.

"Only her way, Mattie," explained the father; "she's very different to all, now. She was more like herself after Mr. Hinchford called—Lor! that roused her for a day or two beautifully. It was quite a treat to see her out of temper all the next day—flouting like!"

Mattie waited till half past eight, and then took her leave, thinking that she would go home by the church-way and meet Harriet. But Harriet had gone round by the main thoroughfare, having a call to make, and so the old companions missed each other.

Mattie scarcely knew what she should have said to Harriet on meeting her, save the usual commonplace remarks. She fancied that she might have told her story of Sidney's proposal, and watched the effect—might have looked her sternly in the face, and asked if it were all true

that Maurice Hinchford had asserted. It depended upon circumstances what she would have confessed or asserted. After all, did it matter what were Harriet Wesden's feelings, if Sidney had ceased to love Harriet and turned to Mattie Gray?

But Sidney was blind *then*, and his heart, ever full of gratitude, had deceived him. Perhaps he *had* read her secret by some means, and taken pity on her. *Pity!*—and she had told him that she scorned it! Well, true or false, right or wrong, she must wait a few days longer—for better, for worse, there was no keeping that truth back, unless it died with Sidney.

Mattie made the best of it, as usual. Hers was a mind of uncommon strength, although her slight figure and gentle face suggested to an observer the very reverse of a "strong-minded woman." The next day she was the Mattie that deceived even her father, who had been alarmed at her yesternight. She had got over her headache, she said; she could talk of business-matters, and of going to the warehouse for fresh stock, of the customers on "the books," and of the customers—a few of them by the laws of business—who were never likely to get off them. In the morning, too, came an immense order, that staggered Mr. Gray—an order for stationery, pens, ink, and paper, etc., from Hinchford and Son, bankers.

"They've given their relation a turn; I don't think Sid would like it much," said Mr. Gray.

Mattie affected an interest in these new customers, and Mr. Gray, who admired large orders, though he was not a worldly man, trotted about the shop and rubbed his hands. The first customer who entered, and told him that it was a fine day, was assured that "Yes it was. A fine order, a very fine order indeed."

Orders taken, delivered, and goods paid for; time making inroads into the new week; people beginning to talk of coming spring, and of the cold weather breaking up for good; Mattie waiting for the summons to Sidney Hinchford's side, and wondering why Dr. Barrio was so long; the hour in which to answer Sidney approaching, and she still unresolved as to what was best and just—for others as well as for herself!

The message came at last, by special messenger and private cab; a dashing Hansom, with the Hinchford crest on the panel, drawn by a thorough-bred mare, which brought out all the horse-fanciers from the lively-stables at the corner to look at and admire.

Mattie opened Maurice Hinchford's hastily-written note:

"DEAR MISS GRAY" [it ran], "we have resolved upon the operation to-day, Sidney is prepared—calm and hopeful of the result. I never knew a fellow with so little fear in him. Bring Miss Wesden if you think fit.

"Yours very truly,

"MAURICE HINCHFORD."

Bring Miss Wesden! Mattie had never thought of that, and for the first time the woman's natural jealousy seized her. Take her rival to his side, and let *her* comfort him, and she standing aloof and unacknowledged!—why should she do that? Thrust upon Sidney Hinchford's thoughts, at such a time, the old love; let him *see*, perhaps, Harriet Wesden's beauty and her own plain

face side by side, the very instant that he stepped back, as it were, to his old self!

Then came better thoughts—thoughts more true to this high-minded stray of ours. It was light, or madness, or death; if it were a failure, and he should die, swiftly and suddenly—if till the last he had deceived her, and his true nature were to assert itself, and he express a wish—one last yearning wish to see Harriet Wesden—what could she say? In the future how that reproach of not having done her best would crush her with remorse!

She was in the cab; she had made up her mind; there was to be no longer any hesitation.

“Drive to Myer’s Street, Camberwell.”

The thorough-bred mare stepped out and cleared the roadway; the shop and the little excited man at its door were in the back-ground, and Mattie was being whirled along to Mr. Wesden’s house. In a very little while Mattie was driven to the old friend’s. Mr. Wesden was gardening in his fore-court, or attempting something of the kind, with a little rake he had bought at a toy-shop; he dropped his rake, and stared over the private cab and its occupant at the upstairs windows of the opposite residence.

“Mattie,” he said, when she was at the gate, and had opened it and entered before he had recovered his astonishment, “what’s the matter? Who’s cab is that? The stationery business won’t stand cabs yet a while, I know.”

“Where is Harriet?—not out again?”

“No; in the parlor—this way.”

Mattie and Mr. Wesden entered the house. Harriet was in the front-parlor—the best room, which had been Mrs. Wesden’s pride, and a dream of the old lady’s in business days—working busily away at a pair of crimson slippers, with large black crosses on the instep—High Church slippers, every inch of them. Not slippers for a simpering curate to receive anonymously, as a mark of esteem from a fair unknown—Harriet was above that; but good colossal slippers, for the gouty feet of her pastor and master, who could not wear tight boots in the house, and had even been known to preach in something easy.

Harriet, who had noted the arrival, was ready to receive Mattie. She ran to her and kissed her. Harriet’s first impulse was a kind and loving one whenever she met Mattie first; only as the interview lengthened did her doubts—if they could be called doubts—step in and range themselves formally beside her, and render her almost reserved. The kiss with which they parted always savored more of the new Harriet than of the bright-faced beauty whom Sidney had once loved, Mattie thought.

“Harriet, I want you to come with me, if you will,” said Mattie.

“I am rather busy just now, Mattie,” said Harriet; “where do you wish to take me?”

“To see Sidney Hinchford,” was the calm reply.

“To see *whom*!” ejaculated Harriet.

Before Mattie could explain, Harriet added, “What object can you have in taking me to him?—in coming in this strange, hurried manner for me? Has *he* sent you?”

“No.”

“He has no wish that I should be near him,

I am sure. This is eccentric and foolish—what do you mean by it?”

Harriet’s haughty gesture would have done more credit to royal blood than to old Wesden’s.

Mattie caught her by the wrist, so that Harriet should not escape her, or hide any sign of emotion which she might wish to conceal when all was known.

“You must come! There is no excuse. In a few hours Sidney Hinchford may be dead!”

Did the change upon that face tell all, or was it the natural result of such news as Mattie had hissed forth?

“Dead!—dead did you say?” asked Harriet, hastily.

“I did not tell your father a few nights ago that Sidney had left us—I reserved the news for you, and then missed you going home. He is in the hands of clever and scientific men, who hope to cure him of his blindness.”

“Yes—go on.”

“But there is a chance of failure, which Sidney risks, and thinks, perhaps, too lightly of. That failure will not subject him to his old estate, but drive him mad or kill him.”

“And you have let him risk his life—*you*!”

Away went the ecclesiastical slippers to the other end of the room; some wool got entangled in her hands, and she snapped it impatiently in two in preference to unwinding it; she turned to Mattie, full of reproach, fear, and indignation. Yes, the love was living still! Mattie might have known long ago that it had never died away, and that to keep it in subjection had been the task which Harriet had set herself, and failed in.

“They will murder him! You have let them take him away to work their dangerous experiments upon, and you will have to answer for this!”

“Sidney was resolved—his cousin wished it—I had no power to stop it.”

“Mattie, he loves you. He would have done as you wished.”

“Who says he loves me?” asked Mattie. “I have never uttered a word to give you that belief, Harriet—have I?”

“No—but—”

“I don’t own it now—I say nothing, but ask you to come with me. If I loved him, or mistrusted you, should I be here?”

“What am I to do?” asked the bewildered Harriet. “Oh, tell me what can I do?”

“Maurice Hinchford thinks it possible—I think it possible—that Sidney may wish to speak to you before or afterward. We may retire and see him not, or we may face him. If it should end as we all pray not, and hope not, you, at least, must not be away!”

“No, no!—I would not be away from him for all the world,” cried Harriet. “I will go with you at once.”

She darted out of the room, and Mr. Wesden seemed to take her place as if by magic before Mattie.

“What’s it all mean, my girl?”

Mattie had to struggle with many conflicting emotions, and sober down sufficiently to relate the nature of her visit. Before she had half finished her statement Harriet was with them again.

"Let us go at once, Mattie!—father will hear all when I return."

She almost dragged Mattie from the room; they were both in the cab, and rattling away from Camberwell, before Mr. Wesden fully comprehended that they had left him.

"Mattie, it is kind of you to think of me at this time," said Harriet. "You have read me more truly than I have read myself. I am a wicked and unjust woman."

"No—that's not true."

"I have had wicked thoughts of you—you that I have known so long, and should have estimated so truly, knowing what you have ever been to me. But oh! Mattie, I have been so wretched and unhappy that you *will* forgive me?"

"Don't say any more, please."

Harriet looked askance at the pale face beside her—the eyes were half closed, and the thin lips compressed.

"Do you feel ill?"

"No—the excitement of all this may have been a little too much for me—we will not talk of ourselves just now. Time enough for your confession, and for mine, when we return."

"How shall we return?—with what hopes or fears of him? What made his cousin and you think of me being near him? Did *he* wish it?"

"I don't know."

"Has *he* thought of me all this while?—loved me despite all? Oh! if that were true, Mattie."

"If it were true, Harriet—what a difference!"

"And now perhaps to die, and I never to know his real thoughts of me. Well, I should die too—I'm sure of that now!"

"Harriet, you can trust me again?"

"Yes, with all my heart."

"Patience, then—we *will* say no more until we are sure that the truth faces us."

They were silent for the remainder of the way; people who passed on the foot-path, and glanced toward the occupants of that private cab, wondered at the two pale, grave-faced women sitting side by side therein.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL THE TRUTH.

THE house wherein Sidney was waiting for the best or worst was situated in Bayswater. A house that had been taken at Maurice's expense, and by Dr. Bario's suggestion. The Italian doctor was a man with a love of effect—one of those stagey beings whom we meet occasionally in England, and more often on the Continent. He was fond of mystery; it enhanced the surprise, and gained him popularity. He was a clever man, but he was also a vain one.

His style of practice he kept to himself; whether his cures were effected by the common methods of treatment, or by methods of his own, were hard to arrive at; he bound his patients and his patients' friends to secrecy; some of his English medical contemporaries called him a quack, others a madman—a few, just a few, to lighten the mass, thought that there *was* something in him. A broad he was at the top of the tree and sought after—matter-of-fact England, not being able to make him out, eyed him suspiciously.

Mattie and Harriet were ushered into a well-furnished room on the first-floor, where Maurice Hinchford awaited them. He went toward them at once, and shook hands with them—even with Harriet Wesden, who had faced him with such stern words during their last interview. There was a common cause that bound all three together, and the past was forgotten.

"We are in time?" asked Mattie.

"Plenty of time, thank you."

"Where is Sidney?"

"In the room beyond there, where the curtain hangs before the door."

"Have you told him that *we* are here?" asked Mattie.

"Yes, he is very anxious to speak with you both before he is left in Dr. Bario's hands."

"You are hopeful of good results?" asked Harriet.

"Yes, very hopeful—are not you?" he asked, curiously.

"No, I fear the worst."

"You have not considered the matter, Miss Wesden; this has come upon you with the shock of a surprise, and hence the feeling that distresses you. But I say he shall get better. We have all determined to make an extraordinary case of him."

"Hush, Sir!—he is in God's hands, not yours," said Harriet.

"I beg pardon—of course."

Maurice withdrew, a little downcast at Harriet's reproof; he had assumed an over-cheerful air to set them at their ease, and they had not understood him. They fancied that he was not anxious, when he felt all a brother's suspense. He had been with Sidney day and night; he had studied Sid's wishes, sought to keep him cheerful, read to him, had wound himself into Sid's heart, and by the act enlarged his own and purified it. The cousins understood each other; all the past had been atoned for now; there was no element of bitterness in the forgiveness which Maurice had sought and Sidney granted.

Maurice was called away, and presently returned with the Italian doctor, to whom he introduced Miss Wesden.

"What is there to fear, Sir?" was Harriet's first question.

She had heard all from Mattie, but was not satisfied until all had been told her again from the doctor's lips. He still spoke of the chances for and against success.

Presently, and before he had concluded, Mr. Geoffry Hinchford was ushered into the room and introduced to the ladies there.

After a bow of the old-fashioned school, he said—

"This young lady," indicating Mattie, "I have had the pleasure of seeing before. Some years ago, when she thought I had a design to rob a shop in Suffolk Street. Am I right, Miss Gray?"

He spoke in jest, but Mattie responded gravely enough. It was no time for jesting, and she thought that Mr. Geoffry Hinchford's remarks were strangely *mal-dropsos*. His manner changed when he faced Doctor Bario in his turn.

"You must cure this patient, Sir, and name your own terms. My son and I will chance your breaking the bank."

"You are good—very," said the pleased doctor, "and I am much obliged."

"We shall have him at his old post, I hope, ladies," said he, veering round to the fair sex again. "A banking-house is his proper sphere—he will rise to greatness with a fair chance. I do not know any man who deserves greatness better—a true man of business—what a contrast to his poor father!"

Maurice had withdrawn, and now returned again.

"He is ready to see the ladies now; keep him up, please, and speak cheerfully of the future—that's right, doctor, I believe?"

"Quite right."

"One at a time. Mattie, he will see you first, he says."

Mattie's heart leaped anew at this; she passed beneath the curtain which Maurice Hinchford held above her head, and went through the door to a large room where Sidney was awaiting her. The sun was shining through the windows upon him—a pale, calm figure, sitting there.

"Mattie," he said.

"Yes; I have come."

The door opened again and Doctor Bario entered, taking up a position where he could watch his patient's face. There must be nothing calculated to excite his patient now.

Sidney shook hands with Mattie, saying,

"It has come at last; and we shall know the worst or the best in a few minutes."

"You are not nervous of the result?—your pulse beats calmly, Sidney."

"I have steeled my nerves to it—I shall not shrink, and I am hopeful."

"Miss Wesden is here."

"You fetched her hither, Maurice tells me," he answered. "You are not a jealous woman, Mattie?"

"Have I a right to be jealous yet before my mind is made up?" she answered, lightly.

"The month draws on apace—I am looking forward to the future."

"Time," said Doctor Bario, and Mattie withdrew after a silent pressure of hands, given and returned. Mattie went toward the doctor instead of the door.

"These interviews must tend to excite him; his pulse is less regular than it was, Sir."

"I am sorry for it," said Bario, coolly, "but he will have his way; he is one man impetuous in that. He thinks it is better in *case of any thing*."

Mattie backed from him in horror; did Sidney fear the result of the experiment himself now? Harriet was waiting anxiously for her return.

"Be careful," whispered Mattie, as she passed in, and Mattie followed her with her wistful eyes. They were a long while together, she thought; longer than was necessary, or Doctor Bario should have allowed. What had Harriet Wesden to say to him?—what would she say in moments like those?

The curtain was drawn back, and Harriet, with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes, came rapidly toward Mattie.

"What have you said to him?" asked Mattie, almost fiercely.

"What I would have said to him had he been dying—as he will die!—oh! as he will die, I am sure of it."

"I pray God not," ejaculated Mattie.

"I asked him if he had forgiven me—if he would believe that when he gave me up I loved him with my whole heart, and looked for no happiness without him."

"You told him that!—you dared to tell him that at such a time!"

"I could not have told him at any other, and he was about to be sacrificed by his own will and these mad relations who have persuaded him to this! He will die, I am sure of it!"

"Don't say it again; I must hope, Harriet, and you drive me mad by this excitability. What have you done?"

"Strengthened his courage—been rewarded by the 'God bless you, Harriet!' which escaped him."

"Did he say no more?"

"Nothing but 'Too late!' In his heart he must feel that he will *die*, or he would not have said that. Oh! those awful words, which will ring in our ears and be our torment when this is over. Mattie, I must stop it!"

Mattie held the excited girl in her own strong arms, and backed her to a greater distance from the door of the room where Sidney was; at the same moment the banker returned from his fugitive interview with his nephew and stood at the window taking snuff by wholesale. A confusion seemed to suddenly pervade the scene; an assistant, then another entered, and passed into Sidney's room; a third assistant ushered across the room wherein they waited, a physician, with whom Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford shook hands, and took snuff for an instant. Maurice looked through the curtain for an instant, held up his hand, and then withdrew again. The instant afterward the door was locked on the inner side, and a silence as of death settled upon the three watchers without.

All was still; the thick walls and the closed doors deadened every sound. Once, and only once, Dr. Bario's voice giving some orders startled the banker and the two girls cowering at the extremity of the room.

"How still!" whispered Harriet at last; and Mattie bade her be silent. Mattie was listening with strained ears for sounds from within, and the fear that had beset Harriet settled at last upon herself and unnerved her. How long would it be now, each thought and wondered—minutes, hours, or what?

"This waiting is very awful," said Mr. Geoffrey Hinchford, suddenly; and Mattie bade him hush also, in an angry tone that made him jump again.

Suddenly the door was unlocked, and the three started up with clenched hands and suspended breath. Two of the assistants came forth hurriedly and went out of the room. To the eager questions that were put to them they answered something in Italian, and balked at the longing of their questioners. Then Maurice appeared, and cried,

"Success!—success! A statue in gold for Dr. Bario! The—"

"Hinchford," called the doctor from within, "come back—he calls you."

"No, not me," said Maurice, whose ear caught the English accent more perfectly, "it calls *Harriet*—may she come?"

"Yes, for an instant—quick!"

Harriet darted across the room with a suppressed cry; the old fear had seized her again.

"He is dying—I knew it!"

"No, no, he will live for you!" cried Mattie, wringing her hands together; "go to him!"

Harriet passed into the room, and recoiled for an instant at the utter darkness and blackness of the place she had left so light. Maurice put his hands upon her wrist, and drew her forward. Dr. Barrio's voice arrested him.

"He has fainted—take her out again. He must speak to no one any more to-day."

"But he will die!—oh! Sir, will he not die?" cried Harriet.

"He will live; he will be as well in three weeks as ever—please withdraw."

Harriet and Maurice Hinchford came back together.

"There is no use in waiting," Maurice said; "the result is as successful as I anticipated. Let me recommend you to return home at once, Miss Wesden. Miss Gray will accompany you, I am sure."

"Mattie, will you come with me?" asked Harriet, faintly.

Mattie moved like an automaton toward her, and the two went out together arm in arm, down the broad staircase to the hall, from the hall to the street, where Maurice's cab still waited for them.

"I am faint and ill, Mattie," said Harriet, sinking back.

"Will you rest a while?"

"No; let us get home at once. How coldly and quietly you take this news, Mattie!" she said, looking intently at her. "Ah! if you had only loved him like me all your life!"

"If I had!" murmured Mattie, "*this* would have broken my heart!"

"Hearts don't break with joy, Mattie, or I should not see another morning."

"No. You are right—not with joy!"

CHAPTER V.

STRUGGLING.

HAD Harriet Wesden been less disturbed by all the trials of that day she might have wondered more at Mattie's manner, and have guessed more shrewdly at the truth. But she had suspected unjustly; and feeling now that Sidney loved her, and had always loved her, there were dissipated forever all bitter memories. It was Mattie's turn to change, but Harriet did not notice it at that time; Mattie had become distant, grave; in the first shock of the real truth—though Mattie had seen it advancing, and thought herself prepared to meet it—it was impossible to smile and feel content. Harriet was anxious that the old friend should stay with her at Camberwell for a while, but Mattie was firm in her refusal.

"I must get home—I am very weary!" she murmured.

So they had parted, and Mattie had returned home to offer the great news concerning Sidney, and then escape to her room and be seen no more that night. What happened on that night—what resolves, what struggles, we need not dwell on here. She was one who had been in-

jured—the best of women come in for the greatest injuries at times—and it was not a night's thought or struggle which could set her right. She was a heroine, but she was a woman—and women brood on matters which affect the heart for a long, long time after we have been deceived by their looks.

Mattie did not blame Sidney; she saw how far he had been led to deceive himself, and how far pity and gratitude had betrayed him; she knew that he considered himself bound to her still, and that only her word could release him from his. She felt that he was miserable like herself, and she fretted impatiently for the day when she could let him go free to his sphere, and to the only woman whom he had loved.

But the change had not been good for her; she was not resigned yet; her heart was in rebellion. Life before her seemed a dreary vista—a blankness on which no light could shine; ever in the world ahead, she traced her figure plodding onward without a motive in life, or a hope that had not been lost in it—from first to last, only in various disguises, and on different roads, ever the Stray!

Was she better off now than in the old, old days when she walked the London streets barefooted, and sang or begged for bread—even stole for it once or twice? No one had loved her then, or taken heed of her; a few had pitied her at that time as they might pity her in this, if she were weak enough to tell her story to them. Her father would pity her, but did he love her, she thought, gloomily? She was not inclined to do him justice in that dark estate of hers; he had never wholly understood her; she had become a necessity to his existence, and he was grateful for it, as Sidney had been grateful—nothing more! Yes, she stood alone—for the love and generous hearts around her womanhood, she might be on a mountain top, with the cold, unsympathetic winds freezing her as she lingered there. Almost with regret she looked back at the past, and wondered if it had been well to save her from the dangers that surrounded her; she might have fought against them, and grown up more ignorant perhaps, but more loved. In a different sphere she would have made different friends, and known nothing of this *gentle* life, where there had been no happiness, and much trouble and remorse.

Hence, by noting Mattie's thoughts, we arrive at the conclusion that this was Mattie's darkest hour; that a change had befallen her which time might remedy, or might harden within her to a wrong—it depended upon the forces brought to bear upon her, and her own heart's strength.

She had heard nothing of Sidney since the experiment in a direct manner. Maurice had met her father in the streets, and informed him that all was progressing well, and Sidney was gaining ground rapidly—that had been "information enough for the Grays," Mattie thought, a little bitterly; there was no occasion for further visits to out-of-the-way districts, now the banker's son could exult over the result of his scheming! From Harriet no news had reached her, and Mattie had not sallied forth in search of her. The day on which Mattie was to have made up her mind and answered Sidney came and went without any one taking heed of it. When would the sign come that he remembered

her? What would he do and say when he was well again? What would he think of *her*?

Mr. Gray did not observe any particular change in his daughter; she was graver and more thoughtful, but he attributed that to her concern for Sidney's recovery. Once he was about to speak of Sidney's proposal to Mattie, and was asked, almost imploringly, to say no more; but he was not alarmed. Mattie was nervous still, and had not recovered the shock yet. She was his dutiful daughter whom he loved, and though her grave face did not become her years, still it was the face of a girl who took things studiously and reverently, and he was proud of it. Serious people suited Mr. Gray; his daughter was becoming every day more worthy of him, thank God!

Still there was one watcher on whom Mattie had not reckoned—a watcher who knew all the story, and guessed more than Mattie could have wished—to whom every change in Mattie was a thing of moment, which affected her. This humble agent, who had watched thus since the time Mattie was a child, had some inkling of the truth—hearts that have but one idol are sensitive enough. Through the stolidity, the inflexibility of Mattie, Ann Packet read the despair, and charged it with her honest force.

One night when Mattie thought that the house was quiet for good—meaning by that that her father and Ann Packet were in their rooms and asleep—she was sitting by her little toilet-table, dwelling upon a hundred associations, that all verged to one common centre, when a tapping on the panels of her door startled her.

"Who's there?" she asked; "is that you, Ann?"

"Yes; let me in."

She demanded it as a right rather than as a favor, but Mattie admitted her without opposition. Ann Packet entered with her cap awry—hanging, in fact, by strange filaments, to her back comb—and she placed herself in front of Mattie, with her arms akimbo, quite defiantly.

"Now, what's the matter with you?"

"Have I complained? Is there likely to be any thing the matter, Ann?"

"Yes, there is. And you'll just tell me, please, what is it?"

"Ann, you forget yourself."

"No, it's you who is forgetting yourself, and me, and all you had a liking and a love for wunst. It's you as has altered so drefully that I can only think of one thing to make you different."

"Don't tell me!—don't tell me!" Mattie entreated.

Ann Packet took no heed.

"It's *him*!" she whispered.

Mattie did not answer; she went back to her seat by the toilet-table, and turned her head away from the one faithful to her to the last. She was vexed that she had not kept her secret closer, and deceived them *all*!

"It's no good telling me it ain't him, Mattie, cos it is!" Ann Packet said, after following Mattie to the table, and taking another chair facing her; "there's nothing else—there can't be nothing else, girl. Well, I wouldn't grieve because his sight's come back; that's not right!"

"Do you think I grieve for that?" cried Mattie, fired into defense. "Oh! Ann, how can you ever think so badly of me!"

"Then you're afraid that he won't like you any more?"

"How do you know he ever liked me, or said he did?"

"I—I guessed as much."

Ann Packet, we know, possessed a secret as well as Mattie.

"You guessed wrongly."

"I guessed what you did, Mattie—there!"

"I am not always in the right, Ann," was the hard answer; "I am a foolish woman, ever ready to drop into the snare of a few fine words."

Ann scarcely understood her; but she went on resolutely—

"You think he's tired of you—that it won't come right now. Why not?"

"Nothing can come right out of nothing," said Mattie, passionately, and not too clearly;

"I can't be worried like this, Ann. I have nothing to tell you; I am what I have always been. If there be a difference, it is only that I am getting older and more world-worn. Won't you believe me?"

"No, I won't. I think I know you well enough by this time, and aren't to be *done* by any reason short of what's a true 'un. Oh! Mattie gal, you're not happy; you, who have done so much for happiness to tother people—and this sha'n't be, if I can help it! You and Mr. Hinchford must get married; and if there's been a quarrel, *that'll* mend it."

"Mr. Hinchford and I will never marry, Ann."

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"I don't see why," said Ann, reflectively.

"Mr. Hinchford will marry Harriet Wedder; they are old lovers, and true ones."

Ann Packet looked fixedly for a while at Mattie, and then burst forth:

"Let him! P'raps he's fitter for her than you, if he's weak-minded and babyish, and can't tell what's best for him. Let him pack up his traps and go—you can do without him." Ann Packet, carried away by the feelings of the moment, went on in a higher key.

"You're too good for him, and the likes of him, and ain't agoing begging because a pink-faced gal is set afore ye. You're young yet. You've people to love you, and take care on you; you sha'n't be lonely, and you shall get over all your disappointments and be as happy as the day is long. It isn't for you, Mattie, to fret yourself to death because a little trouble's come, and you can't shake it off yet; you'll show 'em that you've never been a fretting, and that you've got a consolation yet that their goings on can't take away!"

"Well, Ann, where would be your consolation?" asked Mattie.

"Where you taught me to find it, big words and all—where you will never lose it, Mattie, good as you've grown."

There was something touching in the manner with which Ann Packet snatched from the toilet-table the little Bible that always had a place there, and laid it suddenly in Mattie's lap. Mattie shivered, even cowered somewhat at the demonstration; it had been unexpected as that interview, and for the first time in her life Ann Packet took the vantage ground and Mattie looked up to her.

"When you turned good, Mattie," said Ann, "you turned to *that*—you read it to me, and tried to make me read it, telling me that there was comfort to be found there for my loneliness. I found it—so will you, child. You can't miss what you found me!"

"It does not follow," murmured Mattie.

"Yes it does," said Ann, who would not abate one jot of her assertions; "with you, who ain't like tother people, and who never was. You liked tother people better than yourself, and so got poosed upon; but you're all the better for it—Lor' bless you!—you'll see that in *there*. And, Mattie, there's your father and me, still—we sha'n't drop away from you. The likes of me," she added, after a little more reflection, "isn't much to brag on, but you'll find me allus true—that's something."

"Every thing!"

"You ain't like me, with no one to look to—with no one but you in all the world that would do me a good turn if I wished it ever so. With you there isn't one bu'd go any where to help you, knowing what a contented soul you are. And when it comes to you, allus so cheerful, getting mopish; you, who finds somethin' good in things that others fret at, and makes us warm and comfortable instead o' shivering with fright—why, it's sixes and sevens all a topsy-turvy any how, and no one to look up to nowhere!"

"I must come back to my old self if I have wandered from it so much that your honest heart is touched by the change, Ann," said Mattie. "Perhaps I have been gloomy without a cause—perhaps you are right and I am wrong—though I don't confess to all your implications, mind—and from you I can bear to bear my lesson better than from others at this time. Ann, I'm not going to break my heart."

"God bless you! I knew that."

"I'm going to be just my old self again—nothing more. Not quite that suddenly, but finding my way back, as it were. There, you'll leave me now—to think."

"Only to think?" said Ann, with a wistful look at the holy volume in her lap; "it's too much thinking that has done this harm."

"To think what is best, Ann," said Mattie, rising, "and, failing that, to pray for it; there, leave me now. Don't fear for me ever again."

"And I haven't done wrong in talking of all this—you were angry when I first come in, Mattie?"

"I am glad that you came now—I must have been aging very rapidly to have alarmed one who always had such trust in me. It's all over now!"

When Ann Packet had withdrawn, Mattie clasped her hands together and cried again, "It is all over!" as though forever some hope had been dismissed rather than some fear. Hopes and fears had perhaps gone down the stream of time together, and it was impossible to arrest the sighs for the fair blossoms which had been once. But she was stronger from that day; Mattie was not likely to harden, and it had only needed one warm-hearted counselor to turn her from the wrong path she was pursuing. The right counselor had come—a humble messenger, but a true one; one to whom Mattie could listen without shame.

"I was never fit for him. In his new estate I

might have brought him shame rather than happiness—and it was his happiness I tried for, not my own!"

She sank down on her knees and prayed as honest Ann had wished. But she did not pray for the best to happen as she had promised. She knew what was best for her and others—so far as it is possible to know that—and she asked for strength to do her best.

CHAPTER VI.

SIGNS OF CHANGE.

MR. GRAY, though he had not remarked any change that was prejudicial to his daughter Mattie, was quick enough to detect the new difference in her manner. He knew then that she had not been "her old self," as Ann Packet had termed it, by the old manner which was now substituted. She was more gentle, less distracted, kinder in her way altogether; more thoughtful of what his requirements consisted, and which was the best way to expedite them. If she smiled with an effort still, *that* he did not remark; he felt the benefit of the change and was content with it; he knew no reason why there should be any effort in her looks.

He expected to hear all on the first day that Mattie had received good news of Sidney Hinchford; that he was quite well perhaps, and coming back to his old home for a while—coming back to settle *that* engagement. He did not suggest the name, however; he waited for suggestions. Mattie had shown that she was tenacious on that question of engagement, and far from disposed to state her ultimate intentions. He could afford to wait, knowing that all was well!

In the evening his forbearance was rewarded by Mattie speaking of Sidney. She knew that to hold that name forever in the back-ground was unnatural. She was anxious to keep it a well-known name, and not shrink at an allusion to it, as though she feared to think of Sid, or would consign him forever to oblivion.

"It's almost time we heard how Sidney was, father," she said.

"Ah! it is. His cousin said that we should see him very shortly."

"It depends upon the doctor, I suppose," said Mattie; "he has promised to obey Doctor Bario implicitly."

"That's the reason, doubtless," said Mr. Gray; "well, I shall be glad to hear from him; a long silence between friends is always unsatisfactory, and often leads to unsatisfactory results. We shall hear from him very shortly, I feel certain. That young man, his cousin, might have called; I have much to tell him about his future course in life, if he will only listen to me. I mark progress in him, and he must not falter in the narrow way."

Mattie thought that Maurice Hinchford might have called more frequently if it had not been for the good advice that lay in wait for him, but she did not tell her father so. Her father meant well, and she seldom attacked his "best intentions." He was a man who had done much good—chiefly in a darker sphere than his own, where hard words are wanted for hard hearts—

and she respected his opinions. She had not understood him very quickly—such men are always hard to understand—but she knew his genuineness, and it was not difficult to love him.

"What should I have done without him in this strait?" she often thought; and for his presence there—showing that there was some one to love, and some one who loved her—she was deeply grateful.

"Every day I expect visitors now," continued Mr. Gray, "and think it very singular that no one calls. You will be glad to see Sidney, Mattie?"

"Very glad."

That same evening a letter arrived for Mr. Gray, informing him that the elders of his chapel would be very glad to see him on the following afternoon—a letter that turned the subject of discourse for that day, and took Mr. Gray away upon the next. During his absence the first visitor arrived.

Mattie was in the shop, when Maurice Hinchford entered, walked at once to his high chair, and assumed his customary position there. Remembering what had happened since then, Mattie winced somewhat.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Gray," he said, shaking hands with her. "Given up for lost, and considered the most ungrateful of human kind, I am sure?"

"No, Sir."

"To tell you the truth, we have had a bother with that cousin of mine. He's so horribly obstinate we don't exactly know what to do with him."

"He's no worse?" asked Mattie, eagerly.

"Worse!—he's so much better that we can not keep him quiet. We locked him up a week in the dark, and then gave him light in homoeopathic doses—globules of light, in fact—and so brought him round to a natural state of things. He is told to be cautious, and we catch him writing a letter to you, and we foil the attempt, and get sauced at for our pains. Then he wants to come back here directly, on business, he says; and we take him *volens volens* to Red-Hill, and lock him up in our rooms there, with my sisters to see after him during our absence, and at length he is pacified a bit, and resigned to country air."

"Have you come at his request, Sir?" asked Mattie.

"Yes. I promised faithfully to call to-day, and assure you that he is nearly well, and will shortly surprise you by a visit. He is very, very anxious to see old friends. That's my commission; and now, Miss Gray, about this conspiracy of ours—will it succeed?"

Mattie drew a long breath, and then prepared herself. She knew where his interest lay, and how unconscious he was whether her thoughts had drifted once, but she was prepared to meet all now. It was for every one's content save hers. Only herself shut out from the general rejoicing in the cold ante-room where no warmth could steal!

"It will succeed, I think—I hope."

"Yes; but how are we to begin?"

"Harriet Wesden and Sidney must meet and explain all that they have thought concerning each other—that's all."

"Ah! that's all! Quite enough, considering

how difficult it is to bring them together. Difficult, but not impossible, Miss Gray; we shall skim round to the proper method in due course. Harriet Wesden's appearance roused him, did it not?"

"I think so. Has—has he ever spoken of it since?"

"A very little—he's plaguey quiet on matters in that quarter. He was very anxious to know what he said when he saw her, what she said, and you said; and after he had got all that he wanted you might as well have tried to elicit confidence from an oyster. I try every day to bring the topic round, but he dances away from it, or curtly tells me to shut up. And now, may I ask a question?"

"If you will," said Mattie, a little nervously.

"What does Miss Wesden think? You have seen her very frequently since the meeting at Doctor Barrio's?"

"On the contrary, I have not seen her at all."

"Miss Gray! Miss Gray!" he said, reproachfully, "you are not working heart and soul with me! Here are two human beings who love each other, and will never be happy without each other, and we are letting time go by and harden them."

"I thought that Miss Wesden would have called here, and that we might have proceeded on our plan with less formality. But if she do not come shortly I must visit her."

"Thank you; just sound her, if you can. She's a girl that will not be ashamed to own what impression the meeting with Sidney has made upon her; and after that we'll set to work in earnest."

"I will write to her this evening, asking her to spend an hour with me."

"Ah! that's a good plan—looks better than calling. Now I will just tell you how we might manage to bring Sidney and her together—you're not busy?"

"No."

"Nor I. I have given myself the whole day to mature this plan, and if you consider it feasible, why we will carry it out, and chance the *dénouement*."

He tilted his chair on to its front legs, and leaned across the counter to more closely impress Mattie with his logic; at the same instant the door opened, and Mr. Gray entered and gave him good-day.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Hinchford; you bring good news, I hope, of my absent partner?"

"The best of news, Sir," answered Maurice;

"your daughter will tell you how well he is progressing, and whither we have taken him. You are at home for the day, I suppose, Sir?"

"Yes; will you step into the parlor and take a quiet cup of tea with us? We shall be proud of your company, and I shall be glad to have a little talk with you afterward."

"Thank you; I have not dined yet, and—and I am very much pressed for time to-day, or nothing would have given me greater pleasure. Some other time, I hope, I shall be more fortunate. Please excuse this hasty visit, but business must be attended to. Good-by, Sir; good-by, Miss Gray. How late it is, to be sure!"

And backing and bowing politely, Maurice Hinchford reached the shop-door, darted through it, and dashed away from his tormentor.

"That young man is always in a terrible hurry," said Mr. Gray; "a good man of business, with a knowledge of the value of time, I dare say. Still he should not give up serious thoughts for thoughts of money-making entirely. I hope to find him more at his leisure shortly."

But Mr. Gray never did. Maurice Hinchford reformed, but it was after his own method, not Mr. Gray's; and being a fair repentance, we need not cavil at it. He was ever truly sorry for that past, and all the wrong that he had done in it; he sobered down, fell in love once more, and in "real earnest," married well, and made the best of husbands and fathers. The reader, who will meet with him no more on this little stage, whereon our characters are preparing to make their final bows, will, I trust, be glad to hear of Maurice Hinchford's better life, and to forgive him all his past iniquities. He has been the villain of our story; bad enough for real life, but in these latter days scarcely villain enough for the pages of a novel. Let us take him for what he is worth, and so dismiss him from our pages.

Father and daughter went into the parlor.

"Now let us hear all about Sidney," Mr. Gray said, in the first place.

Mattie told him all that she knew, and he listened, rubbed his hands one over the other complacently, and exulted, like a good man as he was, over the well-doing of others. He indulged in a short prayer also for all the goodness and mercies vouchsafed to Sidney; and Mattie, who had never become reconciled to these sudden and spasmodic prayers, yet joined in this one with all her heart.

"Now," said he, suddenly assuming his everyday briskness, "for my news. But in the first place, don't excite yourself, Mattie, because it ends in nothing."

"Indeed!"

"I am not fond of exciting situations, and therefore I begin with the end, in order that I may not be excited myself. The end is that I declined their offer, Mattie."

"What offer?"

"We'll come to that next. They wanted to see me at the chapel; there's a great scheme afoot for a further extension of the missionary project; they want a very energetic man for Africa, just such a man as I am," he added, with that old naive conceit which set well and conveniently upon him, because he spoke the truth after all; "and they've altered their opinion of that other man, who, if you remember, stepped into my shoes some time ago."

"Yes, I remember."

"But they were too late; I told them so. I said that though my daughter was about to marry and have a home of her own, yet I had learned to love her so dearly that I did not care, in my old age, as it will be presently, to begin life afresh without her. I thought that I could do my Master's service here as elsewhere, and that I would rather give up that good chance than give up you, and go away forever."

"Forever! why?"

"I was to settle down at the Cape, minister at a chapel there that will be completed before the next vessel arrives, and I felt too weak of purpose, Heaven forgive me, to leave you altogether."

"And you declined?"

"Yes, firmly and decisively. Perhaps it was wrong."

"Go back, then, at once; don't lose a moment, lest they should think of another man whom they can put in your place."

"What! what! what!" he cried, jealously, "you wish to get rid of me like that."

"No—to go with you—share your life and labors there—be happy with you!"

"Mattie! what does this mean?"

He held her at arm's-length, and looked into her tear-dimmed eyes; he read the truth at last there, and, though unable to account for it, he folded his stricken daughter to his heart, and even wept with her. A man who had known little of earth's romance, or of the tenderness of life, and yet who understood it, now it was face to face with him, and could appreciate the loneliness of her whose life had become linked with his own.

"So," he said, at last, "you do not—you do not love Sidney well enough to become his wife?"

"Yes, I do. I love him too well ever to make him unhappy by becoming so, and standing between him and one he loves so much better than me. Some day I will tell you the whole story—explain it more minutely—you will spare me now, and keep my secret ever?"

"Ever," he responded.

"He will never know how I have loved him, therefore his memory will not be embittered by thinking that I—I felt this separation very much. I shall give him up—that's all! I don't think that he will care for any explanation—and after that, I should very much like to go away with you to a new world."

"Beginning life anew, and leaving all old troubles behind us—well, if it must end like this, so much the better, Mattie!"

Mattie was silent for a while, then said, suddenly—

"You will go back now, and tell them that your daughter is anxious to go with you—to serve you there, and be your faithful servant in the good work lying before us both."

"If it's certain that you—"

"Father, there can be no alteration in me."

Mr. Gray took up his hat again and prepared to depart. He would have liked to attempt consolation to his daughter, but he felt, probably for the first time, that his efforts would have resulted in no good—that she was already resigned, and that the utterance of trite aphorisms would only unnecessarily wound her.

He departed, and Mattie, true to her old business habits, took once more her place in the shop. She was glad that there was no business doing that afternoon—that Peckham in the aggregate was undisturbed with thoughts of stationery. She could sit there and deliberate upon her plans for bringing Harriet and Sidney together—they must be happy at least, and she must not go away from England uncertain about their future. Two old sweet-hearts, whose liking for each other had only been temporarily disturbed—for whose happiness she had made many efforts, and did not flinch at this one. After all, she thought, their happiness would be hers—and she should go away content.

Then there rose before her that future for herself, and she could see in the new life, in the new world, that which her father had proph-

sied. All the old troubles would be left behind on the old battle-ground; she would make up her mind to that, and thus life would be different with her, and happiness for her, perhaps, follow in due course. She had no idea of being unhappy all her life, because she had discovered that Sidney Hinchford's heart had been true to its first love; on the contrary, she was certain now that she should get over all her romantic difficulties in a very little time. At the bottom of all this was the woman's pride to be above all petty sorrowing for those who had never really loved her as she deserved to be loved, and that would keep her strong, she knew.

Afar, then, she saw herself happy enough in the new world—with the familiar faces of her father and Ann Packet to remind her of the old. New friends, new pursuits, new incentives to do good, and defeat evil at every turn of her life—her young life still—with scope for energy and a fair time given her, not entirely alone, and never unloved, there would be nothing to disturb, and much to gladden, the future progress of the stray.

When her father returned in the evening he found her very anxious to learn the result of his second journey to London.

"Were you in time?" she asked.

"Yes. It's all settled, my dear."

"I am very glad of that," she murmured; "there is no uncertainty about our next step."

"No; we must see Sidney now, dissolve partnership, and put the shutters up, Mattie."

"We must write to him in a day or two about the partnership. I would prefer that they know nothing of our intentions until the last instant—until we are ready to go—perhaps until we are gone. I don't think I could stand up against all their good-bys and best wishes—I would rather go away quietly with you and Ann."

"Ann!"

"We must not forget her."

"She'll never go to the Cape, my dear; she can't go to Finsbury to bank her wages without hysterics now."

"Because she's nervous, and I don't go with her," said Mattie.

"Ah! I see; you're right, my child. Ann Packet will have no fear about accompanying us. And she'll make a much handier servant than a Zulu Kaffir."

"And we'll go away quietly," said Mattie again.

"Yes, my dear, if you wish it. I object to anything in the dark; but as it's for your sake I promise."

"Thank you," whispered Mattie.

While Mattie was writing a letter to Harriet Weeden, as she had promised Maurice Hinchford, Mr. Gray broke the news to Ann Packet, and impressed secrecy upon her. Ann Packet was asked to state her wishes, and Mattie looked up from her desk and smiled at the old faithful servant.

"Any where's you like," said Ann, without a moment's hesitation; "black men or brown men—I suppose they're one or tother there—won't matter any think to me. I'm too old to care about the color on 'em. And, Miss Mattie"—she always called our heroine Miss Mattie in Mr. Gray's presence—"while you're at your desk do 'ee give notice at my bank about my money."

"Plenty of time, Ann," said Mr. Gray; "we sha'n't leave here for two months yet at least."

"Then give 'em two months' notice," was Ann's rejoinder. "There's thirty-seven pounds nine and seven-pence half-penny in there, and they may as well be told to get it ready for me. If they've been a speculating with it it'll give 'em time to call it in."

CHAPTER VII.

RETURNED.

MATTIE dispatched her letter to Harriet that same evening; in her epistle she expressed surprise that they had not seen each other since the meeting at Dr. Bario's—should she visit her, or would Harriet walk over to Peckham to-morrow afternoon? She would be entirely alone, her father had business in town to attend to, and she was very anxious to see her old friend.

Mr. Gray's business in town did not take him from home till twelve in the morning; prior to that he went to work at his stock. When he returned home he would endeavor to write a few lines to Sidney Hinchford; and while he was thinking what he should say, and while, despite his efforts to keep these thoughts back, they would intrude upon his figures and throw him out in his accounts, Sidney Hinchford himself walked into the shop and stood before the counter, waiting for his partner to look up.

Mr. Gray, unmindful of Sid's propinquity, still bent over the books on his counter, and scratched away with his pen; Sidney, with his glasses on—the old Sidney of Suffolk Street days—stood very erect and still, smiling to himself at the surprise he should create.

Mr. Gray looked up at last.

"God bless me!" he ejaculated, and swept pens, ink, and account-books on to the floor in his amazement, "it is you then!—it *must* be you!"

"It looks like me somewhat, I hope," said Sidney, laughing and extending his hand, which the other warmly shook.

"Yes," said Mr. Gray, "and what a time it is since we have seen you! We were beginning to think that you had quite forgotten us."

"I never forget my best friends," Sidney replied, "and you and Mattie are the best that ever I have had. Did Mattie think that I was likely to forget her?"

"Well, not exactly," said Mr. Gray, "and if you'll wait a moment I'll run up stairs and call her—"

"No, you'll stay here," said Sidney, firmly. "Don't disturb her on my account. I shall see her presently, and I want to enjoy the luxury of her surprise. Besides, there's no hurry."

"Isn't there?" Mr. Gray asked, dreamily.

"Why should there be? I'm here for good."

Mr. Gray had just stooped to pick up his books and inkstand; he dropped them again at this, and then emerged like a phantom above the counter once more.

"You don't mean that?"

"This is my home again. They were very kind to me at Red-Hill, but it wasn't like home, and it never felt like home to me. After Maurice had left for London this morning I told them my mind very plainly—it's no good telling

that harum-scarum fellow any thing—expressed my thanks, my gratitude for all that they had done for me, packed up, and came away. I was unsettled, dissatisfied, unhappy, somehow—and here I am.”

Mr. Gray sank behind the counter again, this time to hide his confusion, which, it was evident, was visibly expressed on his countenance. Sidney back again! Sidney, without preliminary warning, once more entering his home as a friend who expected to be heartily welcomed, and as a partner whom he had no right to ask to go away! Mr. Gray did not see his way very clearly to the end; Sidney’s “straightforward” habit of doing things had completely discomfited him for the nonce. He must take his time, and think of this.

He re-emerged from his hiding-place, and laid the *débris* he had collected on the counter.

“I was taking stock when you came in, Sidney,” he said; “just seeing what each share would be, and so on.”

“Indeed! what was that for?”

“Why, you—you are going back to the bank again as clerk. I believe you promised that,” said Mr. Gray.

“When my sight will allow me—that will be in a month or two’s time—I shall return to the old life, God willing. But what has that to do with taking stock?”

“We shall give up this partnership together, of course.”

“I don’t see why,” said Sidney; “I shall still want a home after business-hours, and there is no home but this that I shall ever care for. The business has not become so large an undertaking that Mattie and you can not manage it.”

“No, it’s not that.”

“And when—when I am married, we can talk about giving it up then, or making it over to you, or any thing you like,” said Sidney, “and so we’ll dismiss the subject.”

“For the present; we shall have to talk of it again. Mattie and I are tired of it, and have thought of something new, Sidney. But we’ll explain all presently. Mattie, I have no doubt, would rather tell you herself.”

Sidney looked surprised, even discomfited. He did not comprehend the hint which Mr. Gray had thrown out; he did not entirely see the drift of Mr. Gray’s conversation, or understand very clearly what was the difference in his partner’s manner, which rendered his return something more than an agreeable surprise. He thought that he had discovered the solution to the mystery, and said,

“Old friend, you are vexed at my long silence; you have been harassing yourself—perhaps Mattie and you together—about my anxiety to get away from here, after God has pleased to give me back my sight. And I have been struggling and scheming to get back, and escape the kindness of my relations! Why, Mr. Gray, this will not do—this is not like you to mistrust true friends, and think uncharitably of them after their backs are turned! You should have known me better, and have had more faith in me by this time.”

“My dear Sidney,” exclaimed Mr. Gray, “I have never had an uncharitable thought toward you. I knew that you would always think well of us—that—that you were not likely to forget

us. Until yesterday, I have been building upon your return here, and thinking how happy we should all be together.”

“Until yesterday—what happened yesterday?”

“Mattie will tell you, Sidney—I can not—I must not.”

“Very well, we will wait,” said Sidney, gravely; “there is nothing she can tell me which I can not explain away.”

“Are you sure?” was the father’s eager question.

“Sure,” he answered; but there was something in the tone which wavered, and Mr. Gray fancied that he detected it. He said no more, however; he was glad to see Sidney disinclined to elicit further information. Sidney paced the shop once or twice, looked round it, and then went into the parlor, without waiting for Mr. Gray’s invitation, and looked carefully and curiously round the room also.

Mr. Gray followed him.

“I see the home for the first time, if you remember,” said Sidney; “here, in the darkness, a fair life was spent, thanks to you and *her*. Here you both first taught me that there was comfort even in affliction; and here stood by my side, and fought my battle, two dear friends. What has altered them?”

“Nothing has altered their love and esteem for you, Sidney,” said Mr. Gray; “whatever happens, you must believe that.”

“And what has altered my love and esteem for them?” was the quick rejoinder.

“Nothing, I hope—I believe.”

“Then let us settle down into our old positions here. I have come in search of peace and rest; of the old comforts which my uncle’s grandeur could not give me, and which my contrast only rendered me more restless. I find them here, or nowhere. I take my stand here and expect them, or the disappointment will be a bitter one. This is home!”

He took off his hat, and seated himself by the table—a home-like figure, which Mr. Gray felt was in its place again. He leaned his forehead on his hand, and looked down thoughtfully—an old position in his blindness, which Mr. Gray had often watched, and which drew again more forcibly the heart of the watcher toward him. That heart might have been a little estranged since yesternight; it had borne no malice, but it had thrilled a little at his daughter’s confession, and the thought had crossed it that Sidney Hinchford might have spared Mattie an avowal of such weak love as had been borne toward her. Sid had guessed Mattie’s secret, perhaps, and taken pity upon her; he was generous enough for that, but he had forgotten that Mattie was not humble enough to accept it. Mr. Gray could almost believe now that all had been a mistake, which Sidney’s presence there would satisfactorily explain; and yet Sidney’s thoughtfulness and restlessness forbade it.

Sidney looked toward him suddenly.

“What are you thinking of?”

“Of the change in you, Sidney—and of the home that it really looks again for a little while.”

“For a little while,” echoed Sidney; “oh! you will not explain—call Mattie, then, and let us end this. I always hated mystery,” he added, a little peevishly.

Before Mr. Gray could cross the room to fulfill his partner's commands, the door opened. Mattie entered, and paused upon the threshold with her hands to her quickly-beating heart.

"Sidney here—at last?" she faltered forth.

"Yes, at last," he said, advancing toward her; "at last, as your father has said, and now you. I have returned to find that you have both lost confidence in me, and both misunderstood me cruelly."

"I hope not, Sidney."

They shook hands together, and looked one another long and steadily in the face.

"It is upward of a year since I have seen you, Mattie. It is the same hopeful, earnest face that I have ever known—can there be a difference in me?"

"No, you are unchanged."

"You both thought that I had forgotten you?"

"No."

"You must prove it by your old ways, then, or I shall never think this place the dear home I left a month ago."

"You have come back to—"

"To stop! Why not?—don't you wish it?"

"I—I will tell you presently; give me time, Sidney."

"I am in no hurry," he answered, coldly.

There *was* a difference, then!—they were inclined to resent his long silence by something more than a rebuke; they would not understand that he had been kept away against his will by his doctor's orders, and that he had been cautioned not to write or read, or test his sight more than he could help. They had not been satisfied with his messages sent by Maurice Hinchford; they *had* mistrusted him! It was all very strange, and intensely disheartening; he could have trusted them all his life, and he had believed that their faith would last as long as his. Presently they would know him better, see that he had not wavered in one thought or purpose which he had formed before his sight came back; but the consciousness that they had formed an estimate unworthy of his character would remain with him forever, and no after-kindness and fresh faith would obliterate it from his memory. There was an anxious silence; then the father's and daughter's eyes met.

"I think that I'll run into the City now," he suggested, feebly. He scarcely liked to leave his daughter at this juncture; but he knew her strength, her power to explain, and her wish that he should go. It did not seem natural that he should leave her with that strange young man, and after he had risen to withdraw he hesitated again.

He went slowly into the shop, and Mattie followed him.

"She had read his thoughts correctly, for she said at once,

"I shall not give way before him. I am firm and cool; feel my pulse, it does not throb more quickly because I have to tell him that I will not be his wife. Before you come back it will be all over, and I shall be waiting for you—the calm, unmoved daughter that you see me now!"

"There'll be no scene, then?"

"All commonplace and matter of fact. I will have no scene," she said, firmly.

"Then I'll go. God bless you, my child! If

I couldn't trust you implicitly I wouldn't move a step."

He went away, and she returned to the parlor, where Sidney had been sitting a watcher of this whispered conference.

"Now, Mattie," he said.

Mattie sat down a little distance from him, and their eyes met steadily once more, and flinched not.

"Now, Sidney!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"DECLINED WITH THANKS."

It had come at last, that day of explanation. Mattie would not give way therein; she had long prepared for it, prayed for strength to sever all past ties, and leave him ignorant, if possible, of her real thoughts concerning him. Whatever happened she would be firm, she thought; and now, with Sidney before her, she did not feel that she should waver. An artificial strength it might be, but it would support her throughout that interview, whatever might be the reaction after he had passed from her sight, never to see her again, if she could hinder him.

Ann Packet, who had been out on divers errands, stepped into the shop at this juncture, marked the occupants of the parlor, and went immediately behind the counter, to attend to business during that interview, and confuse the accounts inextricably, supposing that there was any business likely to drift that way just then.

Mattie and Sidney had the little room all to themselves, and there was no likelihood of being disturbed. "Now, Mattie!"—"Now, Sidney," had been said between them, and then each waited for the next words, as a duelist might wait for the sword's-point aimed at his heart.

Mattie spoke first. It was evident that Sidney Hinchford would have waited all day.

"A few days before you went away from here, Sidney," said Mattie, "you asked me a question, and I promised that in good time, and with due consideration, I would reply to it. Do you wish that question answered now?"

"I have come for it," was the reply.

He knew by Mattie's manner what that answer would be, and he steelled himself to meet a cold rejection of his offer. All was part and parcel of the new incomprehensibility upon which he had intruded.

"More than once, Sidney, I have thought of writing my answer to you, but have found the difficulty of putting all I wish to say into words that would not look cold and indifferent to the great honor you would have done me."

"This is satire," he said, hastily.

"Forgive me, it is not intended for that. I would not wound you by a word, if I could help it. And it was an honor to me."

"I deny it," he answered, warmly.

"Ever before you and me that past which there is no shutting from us; which would have been talked about, and have often brought the blush of shame to your cheeks for my sake. Ever before you what I have been; what I am fit for!"

"Fit for a higher station than it is in my

power to raise you: no position is too elevated for a good and pious woman. All this is argument which I thought that I had combated long since; pardon me for adding, all this foolish reasoning, utterly unworthy of you."

"Still—"

"It is no reason for declining my hand, Mattie," he interrupted, with some sternness; "it is simply an excuse."

Mattie winced for an instant, then her quiet voice, firm and even as the way she had chosen for herself, replied to this—

"Let me proceed, Sidney. You will hear me out fairly, I am sure."

"Why not say No at once? You mean to tell me that you do not care to be my wife, and share my home. Is not that your answer?"

"Yes; but I can not let you think that I have been insensible to your offer, or not weighed it carefully in my mind before I thought that it was not right that I should marry you. Sidney, had it pleased God never to have restored your sight, I would have been your faithful wife, serving you as I alone was able, perhaps, and rendering you content with me."

"I see. You would have taken pity on my loneliness: with that strange idea of being grateful for past kindnesses of a trivial description, you would have sacrificed your happiness in an attempt to attain mine. Mattie, it would have been a terrible failure."

"No."

"I say a terrible failure, which would have embittered both lives in lieu of promoting the happiness of either. I should have discovered the motives which had placed you at my side, and felt too keenly the encumbrance that I was upon you."

"I think not!—I am sure not!"

She was anxious to defend herself, to hold her best in his estimation yet, but she feared the betrayal of her secret. She could have told him how, for a few fleeting days, she had pictured her greatest happiness to be ever near him, striving to brighten every thought, and vary the monotony of every hour—sustaining, comforting, and worshiping. She could have told him of the affection of a whole life that had been spent in thinking of him, praying for him; but she held her peace, and let him think that she had never loved him. In the end she saw that it was best to turn him from his purpose.

"I would have married you, Sidney, in affection—out of gratitude, if you choose to word it so, but a gratitude that you would have never known from love," she ventured to say; "but now, when the new life, to which you will shortly turn your steps, is far removed from mine, when you require no help from me, and when there are others, fairer, better, and so much more worthy of you, I can not hold you to a promise of which you must repent."

"Why?"

The position by some means had become suddenly reversed. It was she who had to speak of his pity and gratitude for her.

"Because you would discover that I was not fit to be your wife, that you had not sought me out of love, but out of kindness toward me for my services. You had pledged your word in one estate, and you would keep it in another, like an honest man valuing a promise he had

made, and resolving to go through with it to the end, at whatever cost to his own better chances. Therefore, Sidney, you must understand that I can not be your wife for pity's sake—that the man who is to become my husband must love me with all his heart, and soul, and strength, or he may go his way for me!"

"I said that my romance had died out long ago. That I was too old, and had experienced too much sorrow to talk like a lover in a novel."

"It seems to me—I do not know, Sid—that true love must belong partly to romance. It is too pure—too full of fancies, if you will—to mingle readily with business life; it is too deep down in the heart to rise to an everyday surface—it is full of sacrifice as well as love. All this, my idea, not yours, Sidney—I who would at least be romantic in that fashion, and would care for no one but a romantic lover."

"You have altered, Mattie—you are talking like a school-girl now. If that be another reason for refusing me it is unworthy of you."

"It is another reason for all that," replied Mattie; "let me dismiss it at once, if you are ashamed of it. You have come hither oppressed—burdened, I may say—with a sense of duty to me; let me raise the load from you by saying that I will not be your wife. If I would have married you even out of pity myself," she added, a little scornfully, "I will not take a man for a husband who would have had pity upon me!"

"Very well," he answered, moodily.

"As your wife, never—but oh! Sidney, as the old friend and sister, always! Don't think ill of me because I can not see my way to happiness—don't think that there is any difference in me, or that I value you less than I ever did. You understand me?"

"Scarcely, Mattie—you have altered very much."

"You must not think that—I have not altered in any one respect—I would be ever your friend, ever hold a place in your heart, ever be remembered as the poor girl who would have died to make you happy!"

"But would not have married me for the same purpose," answered Sidney, in a kinder tone; "is that it, Mattie?"

"My marriage with you would have rendered you wretched—don't deny it again, Sid—I am sure of that!"

"Hence your answer. Well, if it must be, I will rest content. I will believe that it is all for the best."

"Let me tell you another reason—the last—why I would not answer Yes to you. May I?"

"I am interested in every reason," he said.

"Because you were bound to another whom you loved once—*whom you love still.*"

He sprang to his feet, and then dropped back into his place, as though shot at by a pistol.

"Do you believe that I would come here with a mask on—a robber, and a liar?"

"Not intentionally, Sidney; because you have fought hard to keep the old love back, and to believe that it was gone forever. You have fostered that idea by thinking uncharitably of her, by turning away from that true happiness which only marriage with her will ever bring to you. You are a man who has never changed; and in attempting to live down the past, have but more clearly discovered the secret of your life."

"What—what makes you think this?"

"I can not explain it, but it is as true as that you and I will never marry one another for love, for gratitude, for any thing," she answered. "Harriet Wesden and you should never have parted, but have understood each other better, and had more faith. You turned from her, and her pride kept her apart from you; but, Sidney, through all, and before all, she holds that love still."

"I can not believe that."

"Your cousin Maurice has told you so—now let me. You will never be happy without her—do justice to her, if you are the Sidney Hinchford whom I have ever known. Sidney, you do love her—are you not man enough to own it?"

"I love her as one who is dead to me—passed away out of my sphere of action, and never likely to cross it again!" he answered. "I have always thought so—I would have told you that these were my thoughts, had you asked me on that night I sought your hand. She was dead to me—gone from me—some one apart from the girl who lives and breathes in her place."

"That was romance—and that *was* love!" cried Mattie, quickly; "for she was not dead, her love was not dead, and you were likely to meet in better faith at any moment unforeseen. Sidney, you *did* meet—you were affected by her visit, her evidence of the old tie still existent. Why deny this to me, to spare my feelings now! I am living for you and her; I do not love you, but I am interested in your welfare, and anxious—oh! so anxious, Sid—to advance it."

"Harriet Wesden and I met under peculiar circumstances, that must have touched both hearts a little; all was over in an instant, like a lightning-flash, and here's the sober life again!"

"You *will* deceive yourself—until two lives are wholly blighted by your obduracy you will go on asserting this dreamy theory, and believing in it."

"You are a strange girl—stranger and more incomprehensible to me than you have ever been, Mattie," he said, wondering. "What can you think of me, that you coolly ask me to sit here and confess to a passion for another, after coming for an answer to a love-suit tendered you. By Heaven! it is a mystery or a dream!"

"When I was a little girl, untutored, and run wild, I used to fancy that you two would marry; when we shared the same house together, I saw how fitting you both were for each other—how, in your strength of mind and purpose, one weak woman would always find support and love. When you were engaged I felt a portion of your happiness, understood that you had chosen well, and knew—knew how proud and happy she must be in your affection! That was *my* dream—let it in the end come true, for Harriet Wesden's sake, for yours—even for the sake of the woman here at your side, the sister and friend to tell you what is best."

"You are very kind, Mattie, but—but I can not own to any thing. It is not fear, not shame—God knows what it is, or what I am, or what I really wish!" he exclaimed, irritably.

"Leave it to me."

"No, for myself, my own battles. I will have no woman's interference, no friend's advice. I will go on to the end my own way."

"It is not ordered so. Look there—is this

chance which has brought her hither to-day, at this hour?"

"Let me go away!" cried Sidney, starting to his feet.

Mattie, flushed and excited, caught him by the wrist. He could have wrested himself away from her grasp, but he would have hurt her in the effort, and a something in his own will held him spell-bound there.

His sight was weak yet, and though he had guessed to whom Mattie alluded, he could but dimly distinguish a female figure advancing toward him, as from the mists of that past sphere of which he had spoken. It came toward him slowly, even falteringly at last; and he remained motionless, awaiting the end of all that might ensue on that strange day.

It was the past coming back to him, to make or mar him. He shivered as he thought of all the folly he had committed, if, after all, Mattie and Maurice were right, and even his own heart had misled him. He was a man whose judgment had been sound through life—why should he have erred so greatly in this instance?

"Mattie—Mattie!" gasped Harriet on entering, "what does this mean?"

"That Sidney has been waiting for you," said Mattie, quickly, "to thank you for all past interest in him. Shake hands, you two, and let me—let me go away."

"No, no, don't leave me, Mattie! You must remain. I have been ill. I—I am very weak."

"If you wish it, for a little while. You two are not enemies now; let me see you shake hands then."

The old sweet-hearts shook hands together at Mattie's wish, and then stood shyly looking at each other, each too discomfited, even troubled, to say a word. Mattie had one more part to play before she could escape them.

CHAPTER IX.

MATTIE MEDIATRIX.

HARRIET WESDEN was strangely afraid of the old lover—what he would say to her in the first moments of meeting, whether he would speak of the past in which she had been misjudged, of the present hour which had brought them face to face, or of the future for them both, and what it would be like from that day.

She was afraid to speak, afraid to trust herself with him, and she clung closer to the skirt of the old friend, a child still in moments of emergency, as she had ever been. Sidney Hinchford stood perplexed, amazed. What could he say in the presence of the woman to whom he had been talking about marriage? What dared he say were she even to leave them to fight out their explanations their own way?

Mattie read the fear of one, and exaggerated in her imagination the reserve of the other; even then all might be marred, and all her efforts end in nothing, if she were not quick to act.

"I asked Sidney as you entered, Harriet, if it were not something more than chance that brought you two together to-day—that brought him hither in particular," she said. "I think it is; I trust that from to-day a brighter life opens for you both. Why should it not?—you

who have kept so long asunder from each other only require an honest mediator to pave the way for a fair explanation. Both of you will have faith in Mattie."

Neither answered; but Mattie did not take silence for dissent.

"When Sidney was blind, Harriet, the thought did cross me once or twice that I had better marry him and save him from his utter loneliness, and I think that he was desperate, and would even have married me! When Sidney or I relate this story some day, we three shall have cause to laugh at it heartily, and think what a narrow escape we all have had—even I, who have never been able to understand Sidney like yourself—as you know! I have only seen, Harriet, that this Sidney of whom we are speaking has become a desperate man, soured by contact with himself, and full of vain regrets for much trouble that his own rashness has brought on him; that he wants one true friend to aid him now more than ever he did."

"Pardon me, Mattie, but you must not speak for me," said Sidney, blushing; "if I have injured Miss Wesden by any hasty action, I will explain it, and take my leave of her and you."

"You will explain, of course," said Mattie; "and if you part again after that explanation, it will be your own fault, and I will never have confidence in either of you any more. For you two—both friends and benefactors, whose childish hands were first held out toward me—I must see happy; I have striven hard for it, and I hope not to find this last disappointment the keenest and the heaviest. Remember old days, and the old hope you had together in them."

"Mattie, you must be a very happy woman some day," cried Sidney, "you think so much of making others happy."

"I hope I shall," said Mattie, cheerfully—almost too cheerfully, save for those two preoccupied ones from whom she hastened to withdraw. Harriet Wesden made no further movement to stay her; she sank into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and trembled very much; in her heart was a strange fluttering of fear and hope, and the struggle for pre-eminence was too much for her.

Yes, she was a weak woman—not strong and resolute, and with the will to conquer difficulties like Mattie; but still a woman very lovable and beautiful, and with a heart that was true enough to all who had been ever cherished therein. From the moment that she had understood it, it never swerved from Sidney Hinchford; it had known its greatest trial when Sidney turned away from her, skeptical as to the reality of any love for him.

She had doubted his love for her until that day when Mattie came to draw her into the old vortex, and then her faith in him came back, and life took fairer colors—she knew not wherefore, save that the reflex of that day's brightness might have shone upon her from the distance. For it was a bright day for both these old lovers; Mattie had anguished well that one explanation—a few words, true and gentle, that scarcely stood for explanation even—would be sufficient, and disperse all clouds that had hung heavily above them. Both had had much time for thought and regret; both had found little solace on the paths of life they had pursued, and looked back

very often at the life they had given up together.

But the worst was over, and the fairer time—the old love, almost, if that were possible—was coming back once more. Sidney had believed it, when Mattie had stolen into the shop and closed the door upon them; he had felt all his old love return at Harriet's appearance, at her fear of him; at her strange half-sad, half-reproachful look toward him when they had first met that day; he knew, then, how wrong he had been, and how rightfully Mattie had read him—what love he bore to the weak girl still, and what a poor substitute for love he would have offered the stronger, *better* woman. Will our readers think that Mattie Gray was worth a dozen Harriet Wesdens?—that Sidney made a bad choice, and that the hero—if we dare call him so—should have married the heroine according to established rule? Or will they believe, with us, that he made his proper choice, and that Harriet and he were the most fitting couple to live happy ever afterward? If he did not treat Mattie as fairly as she should have been treated, it was an error of judgment on his part, and we are all liable to errors of a similar description. He believed that he was acting for the best; he had taught himself in the first instance to believe in his love for her, and when he had awakened to the truth his honor would not let him draw back, until Mattie's pride had released him. Later in life he fancied, once or twice, that he caught a glimpse of the real truth, but he kept the idea to himself, like a sensible man; he had succeeded in life, and was his cousin's partner then—perhaps more conceited than in the old days. And if Mattie suffered for a while, why, heroines are born unto trouble, or where would be the subscribers to our story-books?

This was Mattie's great day of suffering, forever to be remembered as a landmark standing out sharp and rugged in life's retrospect. No one ever guessed half the terrible battle which she fought that day; and how she came forth smiling and victorious, with the deep wounds hidden, lest her distress should affect others who were happier than she.

When she returned to that room again they had forgotten her, as they had forgotten all the doubts, fears, jealousies, harsh words that had stood between them, preventing their reunion. They were lovers again, and were happy once more—for the first time, since he had taunted Harriet with pitying *him*, as Mattie had taunted him that very day.

Mattie forgave them; asked to be forgiven for intruding on their reverie and bringing them back to thoughts of others; sat down with them and listened to their stories of what their future was to be—to really be this time—and how, in their generous hearts, they had built a plan for Mattie's share in it. They saw only Mattie's effort to bring them together, nothing else, in that hour; and they were very grateful, and not selfish in their joy.

"To think it has all ended as you wished at last, as you have prophesied it would end!" said Harriet; "and to think that I even mistrusted you at one time, and was cold toward you, who sacrificed so much for me in the old days!"

"In the old days!" thought Mattie.

"It makes a great difference when one is unhappy," said Harriet; "we look at things skeptically, and are mistrustful of all good intentions."

"For a while," added Mattie.

"Ah, for a while," repeated Sidney; "for we are three together now in heart, and there is no mystery or misconception in the midst of us. Forever after this the sunshine!"

Sidney and Harriet were there when Mr. Gray returned; they spoke of their reconciliation, and Mattie's share in it, and he listened very patiently, betraying but little animation at the recital. He was more anxious to speak of giving up the business, having other views, he said; and still more anxious to see Sidney, the young man whom he had loved like a son, and who had done such irreparable mischief, out of the house. He knew Mattie would have to endure more if Sidney called that place home ever again; and Sidney, who thought of the natural embarrassments which would attend his further stay there, was ready to return to Red-Hill and his uncle's home, after he had accompanied Harriet to her father's.

They were gone at last, and Mattie and her father were facing each other. Mattie's face was white, and her lip was quivering just a little as they went out together.

"Courage, Mattie," he said, "we shall not give way now. We have fought well, and the worst is over."

"Yes, the very worst."

"You will not envy them their happiness—two weak, addle-pated mortals, only fitted for each other. You will keep strong."

"Forever after to-day. But you must not be too critical with me now that he is gone, and I have no longer any occasion to keep firm. Oh! father, I loved him very, very much!"

"It is hard to lose him, I know that," said he, as Mattie flung herself into his arms and wept there.

"Harder to think that he never loved me after all."

"Courage!" he repeated; "God knows what is best for you. He will bring you peace, I am sure."

And in good time, when Mattie was young still, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, rested on her and rendered her content.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

LINGER not, O novel-writer, at the helm when the ship sails into the harbor, or your readers will escape you. When the end is known, and the facts and fancies pieced together, remarks are wearisome. The lovers have made it up, and good fortune awaits them; *bon voyage!*—what's the next story, who writes it, and is the heroine fair or dark, ugly or handsome? The readers are off to fresh leaves and pastures new, in much the same hurry as play-house folk, who scent the conclusion and the tag, are scrambling over their seats while paterfamilias is giving his blessing to the young couple, who haven't agreed very well till the last two minutes.

Who would care at this late stage for Mr. Wes-

den's surprise at his daughter's companion, or for his delight at things "coming comfortably round?" The end is known; there is no room for fresh disasters; Sidney Hinchford marries Harriet Wesden, and there's an end of that book!

And yet there is another scene with which we would fain conclude—those readers who are in no hurry will be tolerant of our prolixity. It is a fair picture, and we will very briefly sketch it while our guests retire.

A scene on shipboard—the ship outward-bound—the new minister and his daughter standing on the deck, exchanging farewell greetings with visitors that have surprised them by their presence there; Ann Packet, with her money sewed in her stays, in the back-ground. Two months have passed since the events related in our last chapter—the partnership has been dissolved, the business sold, friends taken leave of in a very quiet manner by Mattie, who knows that it is forever, and yet would deceive them all by an equable demeanor, and a talk of going away for a little while.

The task is beyond her strength, and she betrays herself a little, and suggests doubts, which resolve themselves to certainties, and lead to this.

She is glad now that they have found out the truth; she would have spared herself a little pain, but lost a bright reminiscence; it is as well to say "Good-by" honestly and fairly, and not steal away from them in the dark, and leave her name finally associated with a regret.

They are all there who have ever cared for Mattie, or been indebted to her. Sidney Hinchford and Harriet, and Harriet's father, very feeble now, and more inclined to stare over people's heads than ever. They are gently upbraiding Mattie for her vain deception, and speaking of the sorrow they feel at losing her. The tears are in Mattie's eyes, and she trembles and clings to the stout arm of her father, while she offers her excuses.

"I had not the courage to look you all steadily in the face and say that I was going away forever; I preferred to see you all one by one, as though nothing was about to happen to separate us, and to leave to the letters, which are already in the post-office, the last news which you have thus forestalled."

"You speaking of want of courage!" said Harriet.

"I am stronger now—I am glad now to see you all—I can bear to say good-by to you."

She says it well and stoutly, too, when the time comes, and friends are warned to let the ship proceed upon its course, and not delay it by their presence there. With Sidney, facing him with her hands in his, she gives way somewhat; she lets him stoop and kiss her—for the second time in life—the last!

"God bless you, Mattie!—best of women!" he murmurs.

"God bless you, Sidney!—with this dear girl!"

She flings herself into Harriet's arms, and cries there for a little while—there is no jealousy now—Harriet is the little girl of old, old days, the first of all these friends she has learned to love, and is learning now to part with.

"To lose you, Mattie—the friend, sister, counselor, whose good words and strong love have

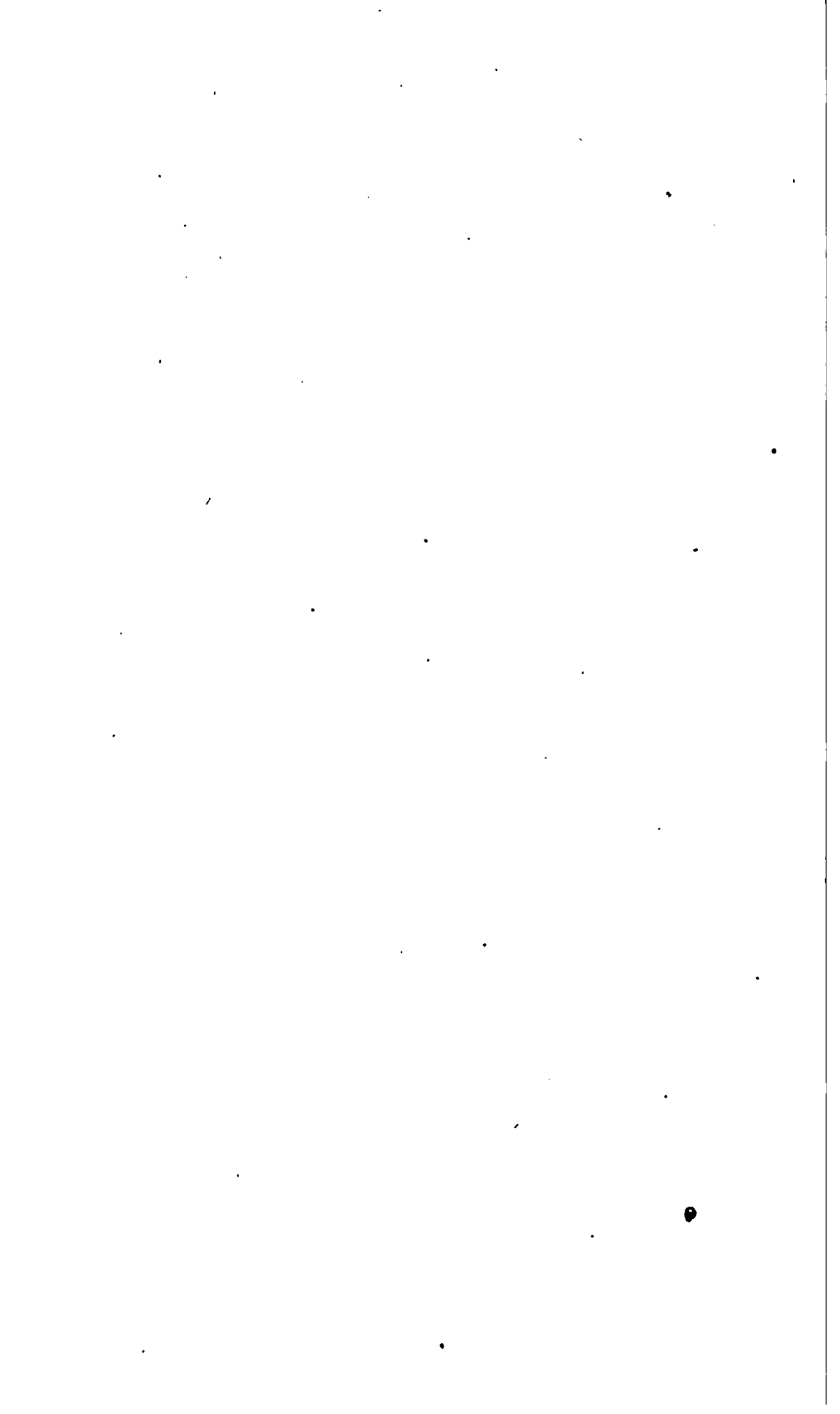
kept me from sinking more than once—it is hard!”

“In a few months, a wiser, better, and more natural counselor than I—trust in each other, and have no secrets—don’t forget me!”

Thus they parted—thus hoping for the best, and believing that the best had come for all,

Mattie is borne away to the new world, where in her father had prophesied would come new friends, new happiness. And they came; for Mattie made no enemies in life, and won much love, and was rewarded for much labor in God’s service, by that good return, even on earth, which renders labor sweet and profitable.

THE END.



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No. 106.

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THE
WAYSIDE CROSS;

THE RAID OF GOMEZ.

A Tale of the Carlist War.

BY CAPTAIN E. A. MILMAN,

OF THE 33rd REGIMENT.

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS 43 CLIFF STREET.

1847.

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OR,

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A Tale of the Carlist War.

Edward Augustus

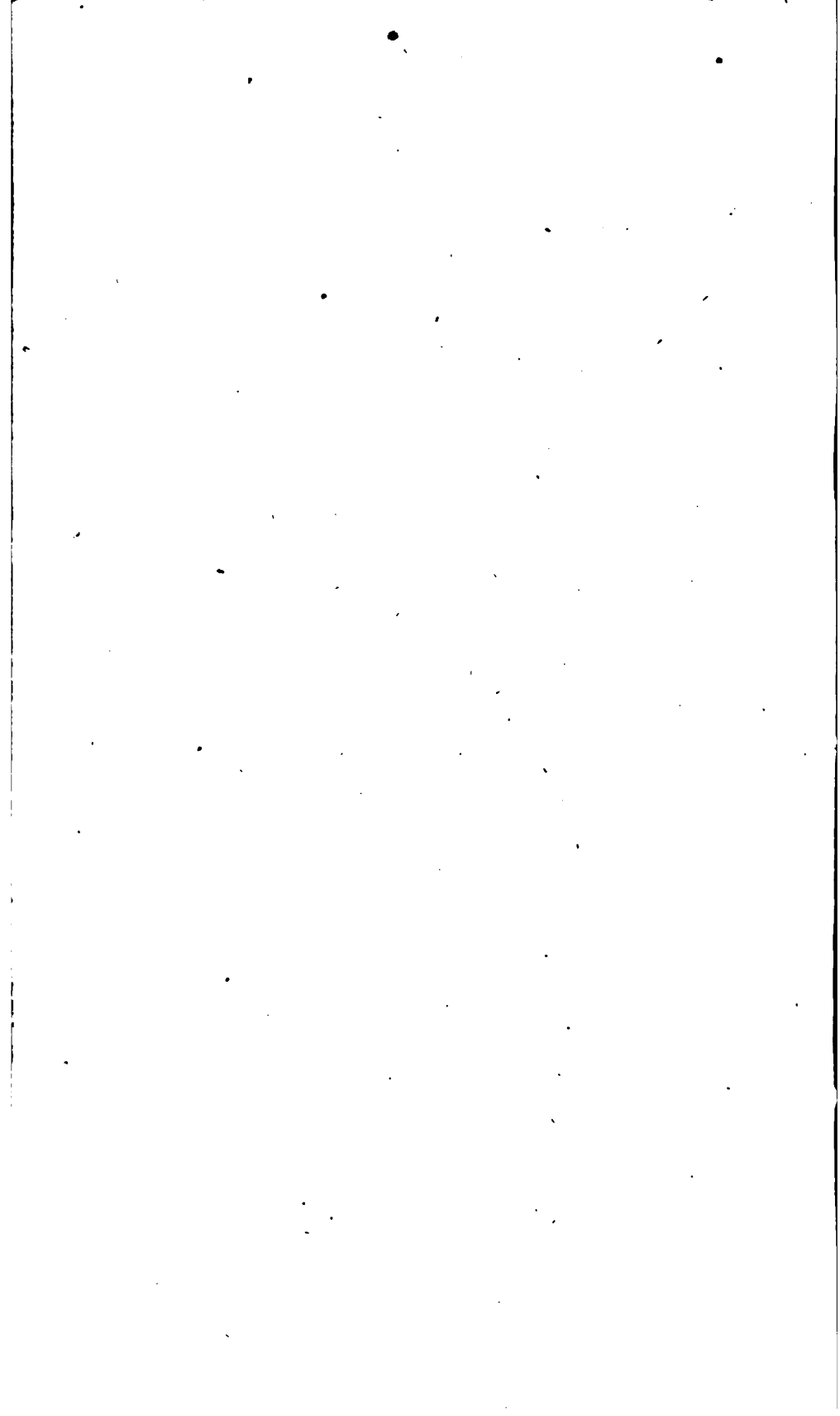
BY CAPTAIN E. A. MILMAN,

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THE WAYSIDE CROSS.

CHAPTER I.

The Introduction—The Wayside Cross—The Bull-Fight at Ronda—The Stranger—The Miller and the Maiden.

I WAS traveling in the south of Spain. It was in the month of June, and the sun shone with a fierce intensity on the steep and rugged sierra over which the dangerous and nearly impracticable track held its serpentine course. Nothing can be more tiresome and monotonous than the scenery of most of the mountain roads in Spain, which it has been my lot to traverse; nothing can be more oppressive than the continual glare and the almost impalpable dust which rises in clouds from the loose soil, filling the hair, ears, and eyes, and parching the mouth and throat to such a degree that every dirty pool and every horse-trough, swarming with queer-looking animals, are welcome as the flowers in May.

My guide—a little, merry, swarthy, chattering Andalusian, perched on the top of the baggage, on a large raw-boned steed, looked like a monkey on a camel, and was forever drawing out, as we trudged slowly on, some national song, except when he paused to light his cigarillo, or to abuse his charger for stumbling. Pepito was quite a character in his way.

Many a dreary mile we went on at a foot's pace without any thing to break the monotony and stillness of the scene, except that ever and anon a huge vulture would rise slowly and languidly, as if disquieted at being disturbed, and apparently oppressed with the heat of the glaring sun; then floating majestically over some dark ravine, would settle on a projecting rock, and appear to watch us with a lazy curiosity. The track at length became rather nervous even to those accustomed to mountain traveling; for it wound round the side of a deep valley, with a steep and broken hill above and a nearly precipitous descent below, while in the hollow a mountain torrent had forced its way amid the uncouth rocks. At this season of the year the bed was nearly dry, though a few shallow pools here and there glistened like silver in the sunshine, and marked its course. The scenery was dreary—not a bush, not a shrub was to be seen; only here and there a shriveled and stunted palmetto relieved the fierce reflection from the sterile soil. The earth, cracked by the

parching heat in many places, omitted a hollow sound as our horses passed slowly over it. Rock upon rock, pinnacled, wild and strange, rose on every side. As we entered a gloomy-looking pass, we came upon a small pile of stones, surmounted by a wooden cross. "Ho! here is something," I said, or, rather, attempted to say; for, until I had swallowed a drop of wine from the bota swung at my saddle, I could not utter a word. A solitary alce in blossom threw a doubtful and scanty shadow over the spot, the feathered tresses of the graceful flower contrasting beautifully with the sterility which surrounded it.

"Look, señor!" suddenly cried Pepito, with an energy I did not think him capable of, crossing himself fervently all the time; "do you see that dark stain on the ground?"

I looked; and certainly, at the foot of the cross, on the white soil of the path, appeared a broad, dark, and nearly circular stain, as of blood lately spilled.

"Look, señor!" he exclaimed again, "that is the blood of a human being. Many a time I have passed by this cross, and there, there that accursed spot still is. The rain from heaven will not wash it out—the earth will not hide the horrid deed. Often have I seen my mules snort and start aside, as if they saw something I could not see, when they came to this spot."

"Hola! Pepe, what is all this?" I said, interrupting him; "there must be some strange history connected with this cross. Surely there are plenty of murder-crosses on the wayside, of which you never take any notice?"

"Es verdad," he replied, with a shudder, again crossing himself as quick as lightning; "but, señor, this was no common murder."

"Well, Pepe, tell me the story, if you know it." Then giving him a good cigar (the greatest treat possible to a Spaniard), to put him into good-humor, he related to me the outline of the following tale, which served to while away the time until we arrived at the gates of Ronda.

"The bull-ring in the old and picturesque town of Ronda was densely crowded. Three bulls had already fallen beneath the unerring sword of the celebrated Montes: the fourth now entered. Every eye was bent on him as suddenly he rushed into the arena, a dark red dun, with legs and muzzle black as Erebus.

"One moment he pauses, as if bewildered—the nearest horseman attracts his eye. In vain the gallant Pinto, the first picador in Spain, exerts his sinewy strength and matchless skill against the charge of this champion of the plains. So furious is his onset that horse and man roll over together amid a cloud of dust. Another and another share the same fate. The chulos dare not approach, so wild and rapid are his attacks.

"Three times did this gallant bull clear the ring before the trumpet sounded for the matador to appear. Montes has strained his wrist. The primera espada is to try his prowess with the redoubtable leader of the herd.

"One onset, and one only, did he sustain. So wicked was the charge, that though he escaped with a slight scratch, he dared no longer face so furious an enemy, but vaulted out of the ring, and no persuasion, or remonstrance, or sense of shame, could again induce him to enter it.

"The second matador vowed that he would soon dispose of this troublesome customer. Vain boast! See, he turns and runs away—O, shame on a matador!—amid the hoots and yells of the tumultuous assembly, for so it had now become. The excitement is fearful to behold. In vain the people call upon the matadors to come forward; none are found hardy enough to encounter so unequal an enemy.

"Suddenly a man, young, handsome, and splendidly dressed in the Majo costume, jumped into the outer circle of the arena, and, taking off his hat, asked permission of the alcalde to try his courage and skill against this savage and implacable foe.

"His tall and graceful figure, unassuming manner, and manly daring, made an immediate impression on the crowd.

"In vain did the magnates try to dissuade him from making the attempt; he would take no denial. At length they yielded. Snatching a cloak and sword belonging to the unsuccessful matador, with one bound he cleared the inner barrier, felt the point of his weapon, and quietly waited until the bull should see him.

"At this moment not a sound could be heard in all that dense throng, save the deep-drawn breath of intense anxiety.

"Suddenly the bull perceived his new antagonist. On, on he came, with a rapidity and savage force that threatened at once to annihilate the stranger. A thrilling shudder passed over the crowd. Still, all was silent as the grave, save where one low, heart-rending scream might have been heard; but the minds of the people were so wrapped up in the approaching contest that no one seemed to heed it. They are now front to front, human skill and courage opposed to brute force; how unequal seemed the fight!

"Gracefully waving his bright red cloak to attract the monster's eye, the stranger

firmly awaited the attack, and well and nobly did he sustain his boast. Suffering the bull to make his first assay, he did not attempt to use his sword, but suddenly drawing the cloak aside and throwing it over his shoulder, he allowed the bull to pass by in his headlong career.

"Again the monster faces him, and he—this time holding the cloak out before him with his left arm, while he grasped his keen and well-tempered sword in his right hand—permitted the bull to charge straight at him. They meet—a cloud of dust obscures them for a moment—it clears—there stands the stranger, erect and uncathed: the bull is rolling over in his death-agony, the trenchant point had severed the spine. So rapidly, so beautifully was it executed, that the eye could scarcely follow it.

"Tumultuous vivas greet the conqueror as, bowing to the authorities, he returned the cloak and sword. A fair cheek, that a moment past had been deadly pale, now crimsoned like a damask rose; a pair of jet black eyes, just now obscured with tears, now sparkled like lustrous diamonds. Their glances have met the stranger's, as quietly he withdrew among the crowd; it was enough—the stranger was repaid.

"'Who is he?' was whispered around: no one seemed to know; and curiosity was soon lost or deadened for a time, for another bull bounded into the circle.

"'Ha! how is this?' muttered a swarthy but at the same time handsome Andalusian, whose frowning brow showed that he was ill pleased at some occurrence. 'Ha! how is this? Does, can Frascita know this stranger?'—and he stole a look at one of the loveliest black-eyed beauties of the sierras who was sitting beside him—'She does, she must; or why those tears—that scream? Our Andalusian girls are not wont to weep at a bull-fight. Ha, let him beware how he crosses my path!' and he knit his brows, and clenched his teeth, till he looked like a fiend.

"At this moment some one touched him on the shoulder. Mateo started, and for a moment thought that he had spoken aloud; turning round, he saw the stranger close behind him, in company with a well-known character, Lope de la Vega el Contrabandista, the only human being, perhaps, that the bold miller stood in the least awe of.

"Daring, successful, clever, and wealthy, and although engaged in the same illicit pursuits, yet honorable to a degree in every thing unconnected with smuggling, Lope had contrived to gain the ascendancy over the fierce and turbulent being before him, whose ferocious disposition led him to commit acts that placed him in the power of his more talented and, perhaps, more cunning coadjutor.

"'This is he of whom I spoke to you before,' whispered Lope to the miller: 'meet us at nine to-morrow evening, at the Venta

de las dos Bocas; Padre Tomas will be there.' 'I will,' briefly responded Mateo, and the two passed on.

"The miller then turning to the lovely maiden by his side, made some observations to her in a low tone. 'Señorita,' at last said he, in a husky though not unkind voice, and as if he wished to be contradicted, 'you know this stranger?' 'Yes,' replied Frascita, hurriedly, 'I have seen him before.' 'Where, and when? where, and when?' the miller whispered, in a tone so calm, and yet so deadly fierce, that it entered into her very soul; 'Where have you met this gallant? Beware!'

"The bright blood flushed her clear olive cheeks as she replied, her voice kindling with all the fiercé of an Andalusian beauty, 'I will not tell! What right have you to question me? Dare you, dare any man address me in such a manner, I would spurn him from me. Begone!' Then, drawing her mantilla close over her face, she turned away.

"Gnashing his teeth with very rage, Mateo quitted her side, and stalked savagely out of the bull-ring."

But where, and when, and under what circumstances had Frascita met the stranger?—that must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

The Valle Segreda—The Attack and Burning of the Diligence—The Fonda de la Diligencia at Cordova—The old Carlist and the little Pepita—The Arriero.

THE road from Jaen to Córdoba passes through a narrow defile, on the sides of which, rugged and rocky as they are, grow stunted cork and olive trees, springing from the crevices of the rocks wherever any soil washed from the higher ground has been deposited; on the crests of the ravine, on each side, a cover of fern and underwood, composed of wild myrtle, cistus, and dwarf ilex-trees, extends for miles, high enough to screen an army. From its proximity to the sierras, and the peculiar facilities afforded for concealment, this spot was at one time notorious for the many and daring robberies committed there; and many a frightened traveler has crossed himself in passing through the Valle Segreda.

At this time, however, early in the autumn of 1836, although there might be some dangers anticipated from straggling parties of Facciosos, or even the Queen's partisans, the spot was considered tolerably safe from brigands, as parties of the Queen's lancers had, for the last week, scoured the country, and had succeeded in capturing several notorious ladrones.

The Carlists, it was supposed, had not ventured in force into that vicinity; the dili-

gence, therefore, set out from Jaen with a smaller escort than usual, drawn by ten mules tricked out in tawdy finery, with huge collars jolting on their scraggy necks. See, here it comes lumbering along—six lancers preceding it at a trot, with their red breeches, blue coats, square caps, and lance-heads gleaming in the sun, holsters on their saddle-bows, swords clattering by their sides—in fact, looking altogether as warlike as needs be.

In the fore part, or coupé, of this extraordinary vehicle there were three individuals. One, a middle-aged Andalusian dame, black-haired, black-eyed, and still handsome in face and features, although her form had lost in fat all the grace peculiar to the sweet south—she was asleep; not so her companion, who, with her mantilla thrown back so as to disclose the whole of her expressive and lovely countenance, was listening intently to a third person; he, from his flashing eye and animated gestures, was probably recounting some daring adventure. In the maiden's jet black, lustrous eyes, the Moorish blood showed forth; her clear complexion, fairer and more blooming than that of the daughter of the plain, proclaimed her the child of the sierras; the dark though auburn hair, the small dimpled mouth, the pearly teeth, the chiseled features—more than all, the slender figure full of grace, the tiny hands, and the fairylike feet which peeped from beneath her black silk petticoat, could not be mistaken; for none have these qualities in such perfection as the Andalusian maid of the mountains.

Women such as these, young, beautiful, and of an ardent disposition, are readily attracted, and even fascinated, by the relation of feats of daring; and if the narrator be in the pride of his days, attractive in his manners, and handsome in his person, let the maid of the south beware. Love kindles more quickly under that genial clime than in our more frigid and formal country. Deeply interested, Frascita (for it was she) listened with lips apart and deep-drawn breath to the animated tale of the stranger. Occasionally her brilliant eyes were lighted up with even an unwonted fire; they would encounter his. Why does she withdraw them so hurriedly, and with such pretty confusion? She knows not why, but she feels that her cheeks are blushing before the admiring gaze of her handsome companion.

Charming preludes of love—who can analyze those feelings, when first the maiden begins to discover that there is one man, and one only, in the wide, wide world, far, far above the rest? The good Tia Dolores slept on, perfectly unconscious of the havoc that the glances of those four bright eyes were already making; little did she dream, if she dreamed at all, of the mischief of going to sleep, good-natured soul! leaving a young and eminently good-looking man, al-

though a stranger, to entertain her susceptible and lovely niece, and that, too, completely without restraint, for she gave full evidence that she was really asleep. As I said before, love in this warm and genial climate springs up like the growth of its own flowers; no wonder, then, that a feeling nearly akin to love had already begun to bud in their bosoms; already the conversation had become more tender and more interesting; already they knew each other's name.

But hark! What is that?

A hissing, ringing sound whistles by, followed by a loud report that echoes through the wild ravine. Another and another follows in rapid succession: the postillions drop from their saddles; the lancers spur their startled horses, and gallop off in confusion by the way they had come, amid a shower of bullets: the cover is alive with men. From behind every bush, every cork-tree, every olive, every rock, they rush with wild cries; some run to seize the mules, others cut the traces. Tina Dolores starts from her sleep, screaming with fear. "Ha! we are attacked," cries the stranger, clasp- ing Frascita to him, and placing his body between her and the firing: she turns pale and trembles like a leaf, but does not strive to elude his embrace. Glancing out of the window, the stranger sees the flut, red caps of the Chapelgorris; in a moment he reassures his trembling fair one, whispering in her ear, "Hush, my beloved, fear not; they are my own men." Frascita murmured in return, "Alas, Juan! are you a Carlist?" Dolores, calling on all the saints in the calendar, hears them not, but faints away: all this passes in a moment. Suddenly an officer comes to the door of the coupé, and bids the travelers get down, in a rough, uncourt- ous tone; but the moment he sees the stranger, he touches his cap respectfully, but with a look of surprise. The stranger springs out, and in a hurried voice inquires, "Where is the general?" "He is near at hand," answers the officer. The stranger continues, with rapid utterance, "Manuel, you must take me as a prisoner; you must not recognize me: but be careful of these ladies, and treat them well; I hold you re- sponsible for this. But no one in the dili- gence must know me for a Carlist. It is necessary—" "I understand you, colonel," replies Manuel quickly: "Here, Pedro, Tomas, take this prisoner immediately to the general; see that he does not escape!" (Then, in a whisper, he adds) "Use him well, he is one of us."

Juan turned hurriedly to Frascita, and, in a soft and tender tone, bade her farewell; but paused again, and said, quickly, "Don't be afraid, sweet one; you will be treated with every respect, and sent on to Cordova as soon as possible; but tell me, my soul, where do you live?" "At Ronda," faintly murmured the maiden. "I would fain de-

tain you, but we must part here. I will see you soon again or perish: now, farewell." He could say no more, for Tina Dolores re- covers from her fainting-fit, and Juan hur- ries away.

Manuel politely requests the ladies to alight, and offers his hand to assist them; the rest of the passengers are roughly treat- ed, and bound with cords. The diligence is ransacked, from top to bottom, the lug- gage is plundered, all papers found are carefully preserved, the mules are driven off, dry brushwood is collected, a fire is kindled, and in a few minutes nothing re- mains of the huge, lumbering vehicle but a smoldering heap of ashes.

"Pardon me, ladies, for a few minutes," said Manuel: "if you will seat yourselves under the shade of yonder olive-tree, I will go and look for a vehicle for you; there is a calesa somewhere." Then calling to a ser- geant he ordered him to take charge of the two ladies, and see them treated with every respect. In a few minutes he returned with a calesa, dragged along by the soldiers; to this are harnessed two of the mules taken from the diligence—one of the postillions is released and ordered to drive them to Cor- dova—an escort conducts them through the dreaded valley. So rapidly does all this pass, that it is like a dream to the bewil- dered Frascita: she strives to collect her thoughts, but in vain; there is a confused idea of shots fired—of gleaming arms—of men hurrying to and fro—of fierce faces—of words spoken which appear to her a bitter mockery, all mingled with an indescribable feeling that she has parted with something which she would give worlds to recall, but what it is she knows not. Dolores, too, be- wildered and half-stupefied with fright, can scarcely remember any thing that has taken place; her teeth still chatter: garrulous by nature, she is now silent, or calls upon some favorite saint in a broken, inarticulate voice: she only knows that the diligence has been attacked and burned, but how and by whom she has no settled recollection.

For many miles neither speak.

The calesa rolls on over the rough and stony road at a rapid pace, the terrified driver urging on his mules with all the en- ergy of a man escaping from an imminent danger. The sun, however, had set before they reached the Guadalquivir, and here a brilliant, although somewhat ominous, scene presented itself to the excited senses of the still bewildered maiden.

Just as the glorious sun had sunk beneath the horizon, a tremendous black ring of heavy clouds arose rapidly above the wild and rugged summits of the Sierra Morena. Mass after mass of murkiest inky hue seemed to roll over the mountain tops and descend down their declivities into the val- leys. Athwart this moving wall the pale- blue lightning flashed incessantly, and

hoarsely echoing from cliff to cliff, from rock to rock, the thunder growled along the hills; while overhead the early moon shone bright and clear in the deep-purple sky, illuminating with her chaste radiance the foaming Guadalquivir, and fringing the edges of the clouds with her cold, silvery light.

And far away the city of the Saracen lay spread below, enveloped in the deepest shadow.

Frasquita, no longer a child, but full of thought, and still somewhat confused, gazed timidly at this scene of loveliness and fear—where the elements seemed contending for peace or war—where the soft and chastened moonlight appeared to strive for mastery with the fitful flashes of the blue lightning—where overhead was tranquillity, peace, and silent beauty, and in the distance war and the majesty of angry nature.

Until that day, Frasquita's mind had been tranquil and serene as the calm moonlight which shone on her own fair countenance. Alas! alas! those angry clouds—that crashing thunder—those fitful flashes—what are they but the symbols of her future life, when the strife of love shall agitate her unsuspecting heart! And is not that fearful strife already commenced? or why did she murmur “Juan, are you a Carlist?” A new existence, though full of tears and trouble, had opened on her tender mind, and yet she knew it not. The party crossed the Guadalquivir, and at length found themselves safely lodged at the *Fonda de la Diligencia*.

The master of this inn was at heart a keen Carlist, although he dared not declare it openly. The postillion, who belonged to the fonda, of course told his master his own tale of the burning of the diligence; but he was easily induced, by a few dollars judiciously applied, to spread the report that the vehicle had been plundered and burned by robbers. Tia Dolores could disclose nothing more than the actual fact of its having been destroyed by fire, and Frasquita kept her own counsel; so that the loyal people of Cordova obtained no certain information of the strength and proximity of the *Facciosos*. Rumors were, of course, in circulation, but uncertainty and unwillingness to believe any thing of the progress of the Carlists prevented the truth from being known.

For a few days no opportunity occurred of procuring a conveyance to take Frasquita and her aunt to their mountain home; and here we must leave them for a brief period, to return to our hero.

Conducted by the soldiers for some miles through a labyrinth of brushwood and rocks, he found himself before the unfastened door of a small charcoal-burner's hut, in front of which a solitary sentinel was pacing backward and forward.

“Is the general within?” inquired Juan.

Before the sentinel could answer, a quick and somewhat harsh voice shouted from the inside “Come in.”

Juan entered, and there, stretched at full length on a gaudily-striped, though somewhat soiled manta, smoking a cigar, lay the most formidable, the most energetic, the most unfortunate, the most enterprising, and the most mysterious of all the leaders of the bands of Carlos Quinto—he who was here to-day—gone to-morrow!—he by whom the nearly impracticable sierras were crossed with a rapidity which none could equal!—he who was branded as a traitor by both parties!—the pursuer and the pursued!—the impenetrable and flying Gomez!

“Is that you, Colonel Juan?” said he, without rising from his recumbent position: “Welcome, my friend, welcome! What news from Andujar, Jaen, Baylen? What news from the capital? Has the gold taken effect? To whom do the populace lean? Will they rise, think you? Speak, colonel!”

“No, general, they will not, and they dare not; for it is war to the knife, and they know it and fear it. No, the liberals are against us; they shout ‘Viva la Constitution!’—the people are against us, for they dread the reestablishment of the Inquisition. I speak freely,” continued Juan, noticing a frown that passed over the general's face. Gomez motioned him to proceed.

“The courtiers and the nobles are against us; they fear that the church lands and convents would be restored, and that they would have to disgorge their prey. The priesthood alone is faithful to the just cause.”

“Well, well, colonel, this is sorry news enough; I did hope that the people might declare for us. But what of that? In a few days I will make a dash at Cordova, perhaps at Granada, and then, like wildfire, overrun the Serrania de Ronda. I have good information that the mountaineers of those rugged sierras are well disposed to our cause.”

Juan started—the Serrania de Ronda—he might chance to see the lovely Frasquita again. He meditated a moment—a thought flashes across his mind: “General, I have for the sake of our just and righteous cause risked my life, as a spy, in the very strongholds of our enemies: will you permit me again to try the experiment? I am known but to two persons in Ronda: one is the famous smuggler, Lope de la Vega, and through his agency I shall be able to get passports, and to come and go as free as the wind; the other—but no matter—is to be trusted. Yes, general, if you think fit, I will go into those rugged sierras, and soon, I trust, from north to south, from the plains of Tarifa to the lofty Pyrenees, no name

shall be heard but that of our beloved Carlos."

With a slight laugh, and knocking the ashes off the end of his cigar, Gomez replied, "I am afraid, colonel, you are too sanguine; but in the name of the Virgin, make the attempt, if it pleases you. Do you go alone?"

"Yes, alone, and in disguise."

The general's eye kindled with a sudden fire as he added, "I will not be long after you; I love to move as rapidly as the lightning that flashes across the heavens: by the Cross of Rome, I will traverse that impenetrable and stony country like a winter torrent dashing from its mountains. But your information must be quick; there must be no delay, for we are in danger here already."

"General, I promise that in less than a fortnight you shall have news from me, or believe me dead;" but, muttered Juan to himself, "I must first go to Cordova."

Two days after the events just related, as Frascita and her aunt were in the courtyard of the inn, preparing to go to the cathedral, a man dressed as an arriero, or muleteer, entered it.

He was covered with dust, and had evidently come from off a long journey.

His coarse, dark, maroon-colored jacket, with the cuffs and back adorned with slashes of gaudily-dyed cloth, was slung, hussar-fashion, at his left shoulder, leaving his right arm and body with only the white, spotless shirt to protect them from the sun. A broad, red woolen sash, in which was stuck a formidable knife, concealed the symmetry of his figure. Blue cloth trousers, loose, and reaching only to a little below the knee, and ending in linen, just came down to the worked leather gaiters, which, looped at the top with a single fastening, and again at the foot, displayed the white stocking underneath; strong, untanned leather shoes covered his feet, and a broad-brimmed, conical, velvet hat sheltered his face from the fierce glare.

The features of his countenance, which was remarkably dark and swarthy, were handsome, and his black eye glanced brightly as it fell upon the two ladies.

They passed him close as he stood near the gate of the court; but no token, or even the slightest look of recognition, passed on either side.

"Ha! this will do," muttered the seeming muleteer; "if woman's eyes, especially here, can not penetrate the disguise, who shall? How beautiful she looked! a little pale, perhaps. I must get them away from this—but how? I may not be able to protect them a second time. Yes, they must be induced to go; but how am I to communicate with her? If I follow, the old one may know me again; and then this disguise; I must see the host, for I have heard that,

although he does not declare it openly, he is one of us."

As he thus soliloquized in broken phrases, Juan, for it was he, found himself in one of the long galleries which surrounded the court-yard of the inn.

At the corner of the corridor stood a venerable-looking, silver-haired old man. He looked intently and fixedly at our hero for a moment, then opened a door, and, without speaking a word, beckoned to him to come in. Juan obeyed, without hesitation, the mysterious summons.

The old man carefully closed the door after him; then, taking Juan's hands in his, with an agitated air and broken voice, his limbs trembling under him, he said, "My old eyes, then, were true. Oh! my son, what news from the beloved?"

Juan, surprised, answered him quickly, "Whom mean you? I know you not."

"But I know you," replied the old man; "you are Colonel Juan B——; you father was one of my oldest friends. You are now aide-de-camp to General Gomez. You see I do know you. It was of Carlos Quinto I spoke, the true sovereign of Spain. Tell me, then, Hijo de mi alma, where is he? does his cause prosper?"

"Father, I fear not; yet, why should I say so? for among the mountains of Guipuscoa he still holds his own, and even now threatens Madrid."

The old man's dim eye lighted with a sudden gleam as he continued, "What you tell me, my son, is as the breath of new life to my old, worn-out, sinking frame. But you seem to fear that his success will not be permanent: tell me more, my son."

"Alas!" replied Juan, "those terrible heretical islanders, the English, are assisting the usurper with men and money; our people are divided among themselves, and I fear there are many traitors in our camps."

"Alas, alas! is it so? I feared it. But what news of my old acquaintance, the fiery Gomez?"

"He is near at hand," whispered Juan, in a low, fierce voice, "and in a few days he will be here—here, in this very town of Cordova."

"Ha! that warms my old heart again; would I were young, were it only to strike one blow for the righteous cause. But, my son, are you not in danger here? If you are discovered—"

"Father," interrupted Juan, "say no more; danger is familiar to me, and I have come on an errand which I must perform, although duty will admit of no delay, and this very evening I must leave Cordova. Perchance, father, you can assist me. There are two ladies in this fonda, inhabitants of the Sierra de Ronda, who must be warned to leave this place immediately. God help them! our rough soldiery are but sorry companions for young, lovely, and helpless

women; and I—and I have an interest in them.”

“Say, in one of them,” mildly interrupted the old man, with a low laugh. “I see how it is; you wish to see her, to warn her, without being discovered by the other; is it not so, my son?” Without waiting for an answer, the old Carlist went to the door, and rung a small silver bell that lay on the table.

In a few minutes, a lovely, black-eyed little girl, of about ten years of age, entered the room, with a large bouquet of flowers, skipping and dancing like a sylph. Seeing a stranger, she became suddenly demure, and, laying down the flowers, turned round to leave the room.

The old man, however, prevented her, saying, “Come hither, my little Pepita; do not be afraid: this is a friend of mine; give him your hand.”

Pepita pouted with her ruby lips, and cast down her eyes, but nevertheless peeped from under her long, silky eyelashes at the stranger’s countenance, as she gave him her tiny hand. There was nothing repulsive there; on the contrary, a smile that went to the heart rested on his finely-formed features; it was irresistible; the cloud on her brow cleared away like an April shower, and, in a moment, the sylphlike Pepita regained her accustomed vivacity, and with a clear, ringing voice, she tenderly addressed the old Carlist, caressing him with those fairylike hands, “I have brought you the flowers you so dearly love, dear father. I gathered them with my own hands, in the gardens of the palace of the Inquisition, before the dew was off: are they not sweet and blooming?”

“Yes, sweet and blooming as yourself, dear child. But say, Pepita, will you do me a service?”

“Oh yes, dear father, any thing for you; do I not love you?” and she threw her slender arms round his neck, and kissed him fondly.

“Be quiet, you saucy one, and listen to me.”

“Yes, father.”

“There are two ladies in the fonda—Rondenians.”

“Oh yes, I know them—one so pretty and so kind, and the other so fat and so cross; I sat with them yesterday; the youngest calls me her dear little sister.”

“Well, child, this gentleman—”

Pepita started back in surprise, clapped her little hands together, and burst into a fit of laughter.

“What is the matter with the mad thing?” asked the old man.

She stooped and whispered in his ear, “Father, how can a muleteer be a gentleman?”

“Hush, madcap! he is in disguise.”

“Oh, I understand it all now,” replied

the damsel, with intelligence beaming on her finely-chiseled features.

“Yes, my dear child, this gentleman wishes to see the señorita for a minute, on important business—and indeed it is necessary; so I want you to help him.”

“Yes,” said Juan, “if the señorita will inform me where the ladies are gone, I might contrive to speak to her for a moment, or give her a note.”

“Oh, I know where they are,” quickly answered Pepita; “they are gone to the cathedral to offer up thanks to the Virgin of Mercy for their escape from some terrible danger. You will find them in the Capilla de los Moros; there is a shrine there—oh! so splendid, of solid silver—you can not mistake it.”

“But,” said Juan, addressing the old man, “will it be safe for me to walk the streets? for, as I do not know my way, I should have to inquire it, and I might be asked some awkward questions. Can I get any safe person to conduct me there?”

“I will, myself,” said Pepita, blushing; “that is, if the gentleman will allow me; but I must first speak to my mother; may I say, dear father, that this caballero is a friend of yours,” and, added she, casting a quick glance at him, “of the righteous cause?”

“Yes, yes, my dear child, away with you.”

“Hasta la vista Caballeros,” said the damsel, as she vanished out of the room with a step so light and agile that it could scarcely be heard.

Juan was lost in astonishment. What grace, what beauty, what intelligence for so young a child! He could not refrain from remarking this to his venerable friend.

“Yes,” answered he, “she is all that; and, what is more, she is good as she is beautiful. Pepita is no relative of mine—all, all are gone—but the daughter of our host. I have given her what education my poor brains and small means are capable of; and she repays me by her charming little attentions and endearments, and by her artless though sprightly conversation. But come, my young friend,” added he, kindly, to Don Juan, who was suddenly lost in a profound reverie, for his thoughts were naturally wandering back to his own Biscayan home and beloved family, “you must not forget to have a note ready: here are writing materials.”

“Pardon me, I pray you, if my thoughts were straying—dear little sisters where are you now?”

The note was soon written, and contained these few words:

“Frasquita, you must leave this immediately; believe me, it is necessary.

“JUAN.”

Just as he had finished, Pepita glided into the room. What a charming little figure

she was! Over her finely-formed head was thrown a black lace mantilla, which fell in folds over her shoulders; and from under the shade of the lace peeped her small, oval face. Her black eyes, fringed with long, silky lashes, sparkled under her arched eyebrows, which were smooth and black as if cut from the glossy skin of a mole; her nose was thin and slightly aquiline; her delicate mouth, dimpling with smiles, disclosed between the ruby of her lips her small pearly teeth; her complexion was clear and slightly olive, but the warm blood mantling in her cheeks diffused around a roseate color; her fairylike form was shown to advantage by a black silk dress, quite plain, and fitting tight to the body—full and short in the skirts, so as to display a round and tapering ankle and miniature feet. She could not be said to walk; her movement was now that of the bounding gazelle, now that of the fish gliding through the waters, or the bird winging its way through the clear air; now stately, yet graceful as—what shall I say?—as that of her own sisterhood, the Andalusian maiden; and I can say no more. In her hand she held a carved ivory fan, embossed with graven silver, which she opened and shut with a peculiar grace, as she said, slightly blushing, "If the caballero is ready, I will be his guide." It was near midday; and as Pepita glided along the narrow, tortuous streets, now glowing in the sun-glare, closely followed by the muleteer, they encountered nothing but a few old women and half-starved dogs. Cordova was as a deserted city; in truth, the inhabitants were enjoying the siesta during the heat of the day.

They entered that vast cathedral—so vast that the whole Moorish army is said to have assembled within its walls, to pray to their prophet before their final effort to preserve intact the united kingdom of Granada and Cordova.

Passing amid hundreds of green and white marble columns, which to the eye appear confused, Pepita pointed to a beautiful and richly-decorated, though somewhat small chapel. In this, before the altar (the front of which was of solid silver, and on which there stood a custodia, also of solid silver, full seven feet high), kneeled two females in the act of prayer.

Juan had no difficulty in recognizing Frascita, for his heart began to throb violently.

Pepita put her finger to her lips, and, whispering gently, "I will wait for you at the gate," vanished amid the grove of pillars.

Juan pushed gently open the richly-worked gate of the chapel, and knelt down behind Frascita. Hearing the noise, she turned suddenly round, but did not seem to recognize Juan, and apparently resumed her devotions. After a short time had elapsed,

our hero arose and stood close to the half-opened gate, and waited until they had finished their prayers. As they went out, Frascita stopped a little behind, as if to cross herself with the holy water which stood in a small alabaster basin near the entrance. As she passed the seeming muleteer she held out one hand to him, while with the other she enjoined silence by putting her taper fingers to her rosy lips. Juan slipped the paper into her hand. Oh, how his frame thrilled at the touch! Not a word escaped their lips; but one tender and speaking glance was exchanged as their eyes met.

She knew him then—yes—and she had known him in the court-yard of the inn; but, with a young woman's keen perception, she had seen at a glance that he wished to escape observation in so public a place; and she feared her aunt's discretion, should she too recognize our hero.

Juan did not attempt to follow, but waited at the porch until he was joined by his little fairy guide. She, from behind a pillar, had watched the whole proceeding, and concealed herself from the ladies.

Giving Frascita and her aunt time to arrive at the inn before them, this apparently singularly assorted pair followed slowly and at a distance, and reached the fonda in safety. As they entered, Pepita, with an arch smile, said, "Adios, señor, for the present; if you will go to your friend's room, I will bring you an answer from the sweet young lady;" and away she tripped.

"Stay, Pepita, for a moment," said Juan, hurriedly; "can not I see the señorita myself?"

"No, señor, that is impossible," she briskly answered; "trust to me."

Juan entered the room; the old Carlos was not there. In a few minutes, although it seemed an age to our hero, Pepita came back with a serious and demure countenance; yet one might have observed a little malicious smile about her mouth.

"Have you succeeded, my fairy messenger? Have you an answer for me?"

"No; the lady could not write one, as there were visitors in the room."

"How provoking, how vexatious!"

"Oh, señor, how impatient you are! did I not tell you to trust me? I took the lady a bouquet of flowers; and as I gave them to her, I whispered in her ear, 'He sends you these; is there any answer for him?' The lady started, but said, quickly, giving me this rosebud back, 'Yes, after to-morrow.'"

"Pray God it may be in time," muttered Juan to himself.

"Do you understand it?" continued the damsel; "I do not; but I suppose this pretty flower is for you."

"Yes, dear Pepita; give it to me," and he took it and kissed it rapturously; but most

content with that, he imprinted a kiss on the glowing cheek of the blushing Pepita.

"For shame, señor," said she, petulantly: "but see, there are your mules ready loaded in the court-yard as if for the road—it is evident you must not stay any longer: this is my father's doing—there is danger. Hark, some one calls me. Adios, caballero; may God go with you, and may you and the cause prosper."

Then, without waiting any further reply or question, she left the room; but this time her step was slow and timid, and from beneath her dark eyelashes there crept a pearly tear.

Juan descended into the court-yard. There he found a large string of mules, besides his own, some laden with oil and wine, others with grain. As Juan stood there, a man dressed also as an arriero, or muleteer, came up to him and whispered, "Señor, there is danger; you must not stay in Cordova. You are a friend of the great smuggler, Lope de la Vega; so am I. You are going to Ronda; so am I. Here is a fresh passport for you. But you must come with me; and we must pass through the Puerta de Aceite."

"And who told you all this, my friend? Who has done this for me?"

"A friend to Carlos," answered the arriero, grinning. "But come along; the mules are all loaded; see how well I have balanced their packs. But, señor, don't forget to speak Andaluz—that is, if you can;" and he shouted to his beasts, "Hup, hup, arre mulos—arre cantaneo—arre bavico—arre;" and getting them into a line, away they clattered through the ill-paved streets.

Such was the wild, adventurous sort of life our hero had been living for some time past. Clever, daring, and of a frank disposition, he was easily accustomed to any change of dress or manners, and equal to any contingency that might arise in a path so fraught with dangers and difficulties as the one in which he was now treading.

We shall not follow him or his thoughts, nor Frasquita and her aunt, on their long and tiresome journey to Ronda through the rugged sierras, for no adventures, that I know of, happened to either: both arrived safely, and had been a whole day in the Eagle's Nest before the events related in the first chapter occurred.

Yet these were the stirring scenes in which Frasquita had twice met the handsome and dashing Carlist, and in this short time there had been sown in the bosoms of both the mighty seeds of love; but, oh! what a stormy time was this for such a flower to bud!

CHAPTER III.

Ronda by Moonlight—The Miller soliloquizes—The open Window—The young Carlist and the Christina Maiden—The Charcoal-Burner and his fierce Employer—The Watcher watched.

He who has not passed a summer evening among gardens in the south of Spain has never felt the climate of a terrestrial paradise. When, after the fierce heat of the glaring day, the gentle night-breeze comes softly fanning the air, rustling the leaves of the olive-trees, and bearing on its wings the perfume of the rose, the orange-flower, and the magnolia which lift up their drooping, yet beautiful heads, refreshed by the cooling dew—when the full moon, hanging in the deep purple sky, surrounds herself with a glowing light, and fringes with her soft rays the dark and frowning rocks which cast deep shadows into the valley below, where a silver stream meanders like a white, shining serpent—when from every orange, every myrtle grove, the answering nightingales pour their love-lorn songs, filling the night with plaintive music, which, mingling with the murmuring splash of falling waters, creates a melody so soft, so pleasing, so harmonious, that the enraptured hearer might well awake and exclaim, "Such was Paradise!" and such was the night that followed the day of the bull-fight.

It was near midnight, yet the Alameda was still thronged with lovely women and admiring men, promenading amid the trees, or seated in picturesque groups on the benches, enjoying the fresh breeze of the night, or listening to the nightingales, while occasionally the joke and laugh went merrily round. Outside, too, in the open space in front of the inclosure, the mirth was boisterous, where still the dull glare from the fires of the gipsy women cooking fritters, threw a red light on the dark, swarthy figures of the muleteers and charcoal-burners that stood in noisy, chattering groups around them.

On a bench at the farthest end of the Alameda reclined a figure wrapped up in a large, dark cloak: apparently lost in contemplation, he paid no heed to the glorious scene before him.

Immediately beneath his feet yawned a precipice of several hundred feet in depth, the verge fenced by an iron paling; the face of this for a considerable distance was smooth, and as if scarp'd by the hand of man.

In the broken valley below, groves of myrtle and orange-trees, and flowery gardens, were mingled in strange yet beautiful confusion with dark and massive rocks far away into the distance; amid them wound, like a thread of silver, the clear, bright stream of the Rio Verde, now concealed from the view by a huge mass of rock, now leaping and foaming over some slippery ledge, now turning a mill, now irrigating in slender

streams some scented rose-bed, while upon all this the moon shed her soft, chaste rays, and from every grove the nightingales poured a flood of song.

But he who lay there heard not the voices of the birds, the murmuring of the waters; he smelled not the perfume of the flowers; he saw not that lovely valley, that glistening stream, for his thoughts were a chaos of evil, where hatred, jealousy, and revenge were struggling in wild confusion. Oh, baneful contrast! around this man nature was a shining heaven, within him was a hell. An hour has elapsed, the Alameda is nearly deserted, yet he stirs not; but in that hour what has passed in his wolfish soul? If thoughts are crimes, what had not in that short hour been committed? Dark ingratitude, base treachery, horrid murder flashed in quick succession before him; yet his mind revolts not from them. He is still wrapped in contemplation, not because his feelings waver, and his heart trembles, but that he has as yet devised no certain plan of gaining his end.

One might have thought that he was asleep, but for a sinister and demoniacal smile that played around his compressed lips.

And who is this fiend in human form, this ghoul, this meditator of evil? It is Mateo, the miller of the Moraima.

See, he rises from his recumbent position as if suddenly awakened, and, with a keen, quick, searching glance, looks around: there is no one there; he is apparently satisfied, and sinks back again upon the bench; but as he still sits there his thoughts find vent in broken sentences; now he speaks aloud, as if addressing some one, now he mutters indistinctly to himself: let us read them for him.

"I care not; whosoever brings most grist to my mill, he is the man for me. Viva Carlos Quinto, say I; for if he had not put his foot into the stirrup to mount the throne of Spain, the red gold I so dearly love would not have poured forth so freely; and viva Roma; for, after all, she is the spring from whence the stream flows, and Carlos is the only channel that brings it down in such plentiful rivers to feed us pobrecitos; and, above all, viva el Padre, who distributes it with so bountiful a hand. That Lope thinks me a savage fool, ay, a fool with a ready hand but small wit—that the gun and the knife are my only assistants: now let him beware lest I foil him with his own weapons. Yes, he is cunning and crafty as an old gray fox, and I am rash, savage, impetuous, and headstrong as a bull in the arena. But behold, I have taken up my cards, and they are good; and he shall find that, when the stake is large, the miller can play as deep a game as the smuggler: not to break with Don Carlos, but to make away with his em-

issary; to give Frascita a husband, and deprive her of a lover; to dupe the cunning Lope, yet keep him my friend: but is that possible? We shall see. Yes, beauty, and gold, and revenge, these are the stakes I play for. That madman of a Carlist to show himself so openly in the bull-ring! but that may serve my purposes. Frascita knows him, loves him—that, too, will assist me. But he must die—he must die—betwixt him and me there is no compromise; it must be annihilation, for we can not breathe the same air. This stranger hath dared to cross my path, and is my rival; ay, and I fear a successful one; his blood, therefore, must flow: will not that be a sweet revenge? Frascita slights and despises me; I will marry her in spite of man or hell. Is not that a glorious revenge to contemplate? Lope, too, by his superior cunning, thinks that he has obtained a strong ascendancy over my weak mind, but I will outwit him. Will not that, too, be revenge? Ay, revenge! revenge! revenge!" (and he hissed the words through his close-knit teeth). "A thousand curses on this stranger! I can not denounce him openly, for then I should lose my gold; I dare not do it secretly, for that wily Lope would suspect me. Perhaps I may yet be mistaken, and Frascita does not love him: but no, but no, she does; furies light on him! At all risks he must be removed from my path, blotted out forever from my sight: Spain can not hold us two; and yet I can fix on no settled plan; and as we meet tomorrow, I must appear *his* friend; ten thousand devils! *his* friend!"

Thus partly soliloquized, partly thought, this fierce and bloody man. He who was sometimes called, when it could not come to his ears, "the Demon of the Moraima." He it was who in the streets of San Roque, in the noon-day, and on the Sabbath, caused the unfortunate muleteer, Pepito el Rubio, to kneel down, and in that humble posture to receive his death from the muzzle of his escopeta. This was *he* at whose name the inmates of the convent, in the recesses of the dark cork-wood, shuddered and crossed themselves—the smuggler, the traitor, the murderer. But in that country, and in that time especially, the life of man, as that of a beast, was of small value—the law as empty sound, or an echo from the mountains. Then start not, reader, at such deeds, for they were common, where civil strife desolated the villages and laid waste the fertile vegas, or concealed itself among the rocky sierras—where the war was that of savages, implacable and murderous—where even helpless women were destroyed in cold blood—a war unnatural in its origin, ferocious in its progress, miserable and pusillanimous in its execution, demoralizing in its consequences, and in its end anarchy and confusion.

Such were the characteristics of those times; then who can wonder at such crimes—at such a monster!

During these soft moonlit hours, at the open window of a house which stood by itself in a small though pretty garden, not far removed from the brink of the frowning cliff on which is perched the Eagle's Nest, sat Frascita, with her forehead buried in her hand, while the night air gently fanned her feverish cheeks, and the pale moonbeams shone on her dark, lustrous tresses, which fell in loose and graceful masses over her bosom and round the taper arm which rested on the window-sill; the other hung still and motionless by her side, and in that hand were some faded flowers. She is not asleep; for a tear rolls gently down her smooth, soft cheek, and a convulsive sigh heaves her swelling bosom.

Betrothed by her uncle, whom she fondly loves, to the formidable miller, no wonder then that she is agitated; for she now hates, yet fears him. If she before disliked his presence, she now lothes it; for a bright being has passed before her senses. Yet the appearance of this being has been as a meteor flashing on her path—an *ignus fatuus* which she dreads, yet needs must follow and see again.

Her heart, her whole existence, is full of uncontrollable and passionate love, which, with the power of an earthquake, has disturbed her mind, and left there a wild and harassing confusion. She feels that between this being and her there is a great gulf stretched; but over this she would fain pass on the thin and narrow plank of hope, the end of which she can not see.

As Frascita sat there in this dejected, sorrowful mood, the notes of a guitar, struck by a masterly hand, issued from the garden beneath the window. She started from her painful reverie, arose, and looked out; but she could see no one. Presently a voice began to accompany the music. "It is he," whispered her beating heart. The voice came nearer and nearer, and she could distinguish the words of a simple melody, sung in a clear, manly tone. She threw back her disordered tresses, and listened—

"The nightingales are singing now
In every orange grove,
The splashing fountains murmuring flow—
And sleepest thou, my love!

The stars are set in deepest blue,
The perfumed zephyrs rove
Amid the rosebuds fresh with dew—
And sleepest thou, my love!

And hark, amid the flood of song
Soft coos the plaintive dove,
The frowning cliffs the notes prolong—
And sleepest thou, my love!

The waters of the moonlit stream
Come dashing from above,

Like sparkling visions of a dream—
And sleepest thou, my love?

Awake, my soul, my love, draw near,
And listen to my vow,
While all is still, and none can hear
My tale of love save thou."

Frascita mechanically leaned out of the window to hear the sounds, and catch the meaning of the words that were sung by a voice she already knew but too well. As she looked out, the faded nosegay fell from her hands to the grass beneath.

A man came out from the shadow of the trees, and stood for a moment in the moonlight: He stooped and picked up the flowers, kissed them, and placed them near his heart. As he did so, she shrunk back into the shadow of the room.

For some moments neither dared to speak.

At last a voice whispered, in a soft and tender tone, "Frascita."

"Oh, Juan, why do you run such a risk?"

"Frascita."

"Oh, fly, fly from this! Should Mateo see you!"

"Frascita! dear Frascita!"

"Alas, I dare not. Oh, blessed Virgin, have pity on me and help me!"

"Will you not speak, Frascita?"

"Juan, spare me."

"Oh, Frascita, life of my soul, will you not answer me?"

"Oh, spare me, spare me!"

Frascita's words were inaudible to Juan. She clasped her hands together in agony. Fear and love were struggling in her heart. But it was not of long duration, for, led by an irresistible impulse, she drew near the window again. Again the pale moonlight fell on her waving tresses. He had retired.

"Juan, hist."

A moment after a rosebud, also withered, fell at her feet. She, too, took it up, and kissed it, and placed in her bosom. As she did so, the full flood of love, gushing from her heart, rushed circling through her veins. Her bosom heaved—her eyes beamed with softened brilliancy—her heart throbbed wildly—and she knew that she loved with all the ardor and intensity of an Andalusian maiden's first love.

"Juan, Juan," she softly murmured.

"I am here, dearest. Oh, thanks, thanks for those words! Now these withered flowers are ten thousand times more precious to me than all the roses of the valley. Frascita, do you love me? Say but this, and I am happy."

"Oh fly, oh fly, Juan!—you are beset with dangers here."

"I care not, if you love me, Frascita."

"Oh, Juan, this is madness."

"Is it madness to love you, my Frascita?"

"Oh, Juan, are you not a Carlist? Is it

not death if you are discovered? Oh fly, fly, I beseech you."

"What matters it? Are we not of the same country, the same people, the same faith? When these unhappy feuds are over—"

"Still, if you love me, fly, Juan—my uncle—" she dared not say Mateo.

"And who is your uncle, Frascita?"

"He who left the bull-ring with you."

"Lope?"

"Yes."

"Gracias á Dios, he too is a Carlist!"

"Oh, Juan, believe it not, I beseech you: he is a crafty man."

At that moment a rustling sound fell on Juan's ear, as if the leaves and twigs of the orange-trees had been pushed aside by an animal feeding—then again all was silent. At the same time might have been seen the dark, swarthy figure of a charcoal-burner creeping along the edge of the precipice, clinging, with the tenacity and agility of a cat, with his hands and feet to the projecting and rugged rocks, and moving as stealthily and noiselessly. He was soon lost in the broad shadow cast by the moonlight deep into the valley.

"Juan, I heard a noise."

"It was nothing, dearest, but the rustling of the leaves by the wind."

"But there is no wind, Juan."

"It was fancy then, dearest."

"Oh, no, no, Juan!—If we are watched?"

"Who is there to watch us?"

"He!"—and the maiden shuddered.

"And who is he, Frascita?"

"I can not, I dare not tell you, Juan."

"But Lope shall," muttered Juan to himself.

Steps were now heard approaching, and the light of a distant torch threw a red glare down the street.

"It is my uncle. Oh, Juan, go!—you must not be seen here: go, if you love me!"

"Good night, dearest: I will see you to-morrow."

"Fare thee well, Juan;" and the maiden retired from the window.

With a joyous step the light-hearted Carlist vanished amid the orange-trees.

Frascita threw herself on a couch and burst into tears.

The charcoal-burner passed, though not unheeded, through the nearly deserted streets, and entered the Alameda. He proceeded straight to the farthest end, which was now dark by the shadow of the trees. He whistled; the whistle was returned.

"Hist, is that you, Manolo?" said the voice of the savage miller.

"Si, señor, at your service."

"Have you succeeded?"

"Yes; I dogged him all the evening, and never lost sight of him for a moment, except when in the house, and then I watched the

door like a cat does a mouse-hole. At last, about an hour or more ago, I saw him come out of his lodgings with a guitar in his hand. I followed him to the house in the garden by the French gate. You know it, señor?"

"Yes, yes," said Mateo impatiently;

"Lope lives there."

"Right, señor. Well, I got over the wall, and, creeping behind a bush near the edge of the precipice, lay there like a hare in its form. I held my breath; presently he began to play and sing underneath an open window; a señorita sat there—"

"Hell and furies!" interrupted Mateo, in a savage voice: "it was she."

"The señorita dropped something, I could not see what; but he picked it up, and I saw him, by the moonlight, kiss it."

"Curses on him! No doubt a letter. My brain is on fire. Why did you not stab him, Manolo?"

"Because you did not tell me to do it, Señor Mateo. Oh, I could have done it so handily! he was so close to me at one time that my fingers itched." And the ruffian mechanically grasped with his hand the long knife that was stuck in his dirty sash.

"Would that you had put your knife into his heart—but no, not yet. Go on, Manolo; did they speak?"

"O yes, a long time; I heard the señorita tell him to go away."

"Did he go?"

"No; I left him there."

"What did they talk about?"

"I don't know, Señor Mateo, exactly; but I think they were love-making."

"A hundred thousand devils! She does love him, then. Did I not read that scream aright? Are you sure it was the man?"

"How could I mistake? Is he not the tallest and handsomest man at the fair?"

"Yes, yes, curses on him! that is what has bewitched the girl. You must continue to watch him, Manolo; here is money for you; now, good-night! leave me."

"This may be useful to you before long," said Manolo, as he departed, touching his knife, and grinning: "Good-night, señor."

I said that the charcoal-burner was not unheeded as he passed through the deserted streets.

Scarcely had he quitted the garden, like a stealthy wolf, when another man, in the dress of an arriero, followed close on his steps, but keeping in the dark sides of the streets. He, too, entered the Alameda, and concealed himself behind a tree. He did not remain there, however, for more than a few minutes, but disappeared as silently as he had come.

To explain this we must revert to the time when Lope quitted the bull-ring with the handsome stranger.

Conducted by Lope down a winding and nearly precipitous path, Juan found himself

among the beautiful gardens mentioned in the first part of the chapter.

As they seated themselves under a shady olive-tree, with the clear, bright stream running at their feet, Lope said,

"Here, Colonel Juan, we can talk freely; I have much, much to thank you for."

"How so, Lope? If there are any thanks due, they are due to you."

"Did not you protect two ladies, Rondonians, when the diligence was burned somewhere near Andujar?"

"Who told you of this?"

"One of the ladies. Had you not been known to me before, believe me, this would have been a sufficient passport to my heart. But it was rash of you to do the matador's part, though you did it so successfully. She must have recognized you."

"Who?"

"La Señora Dolores."

"I think not."

"But it was she who told me of your rescuing them from the ladrones, in the most gallant manner; and I suspect it was you who persuaded them to leave Cordova. Have you heard the news? It is rumored here that Gomez has attacked Cordova, burned and plundered it."

"No, indeed; he has begun soon."

"This will make the authorities here more suspicious; you must be cautious. There is one man, too—he to whom I spoke as we came out of the ring—that you must be careful not to offend; he is dangerous."

"What! he who was sitting by Frascita?"

"How—you know her name?"

"Yes," said Juan, carelessly; "I heard her aunt call her so."

"Well—you must be careful, Colonel Juan; for if you are not, your situation here will be precarious in the extreme. But, above all things, do not offend Mateo; you will meet him to-morrow."

Juan promised caution; how he kept it has been already seen.

The rest of their conversation referred entirely to the prospects of the Carlist party.

After they had parted, Lope called one of his most trusty followers to him (of whom many were at the fair), and directed this man to keep watch over the movements of the young Carlist—to see if he was followed—and by whom. He dreaded, and with good reason, the jealous and ferocious disposition of the miller; for to his clear-seeing mind it was evident, from the almost complete silence of Frascita concerning her acquaintance with the stranger, both in the adventure of the diligence and at Cordova, that more had passed between them than she had been willing to confess. He knew that she disliked Mateo; that she was of a susceptible and loving disposition; and that the Carlist was young, prepossessing, and eminently handsome. His intelligent fol-

lower had watched the watcher, and this will account for the third party in the garden.

Who of these three?—this fair girl, agitated by love, by hopes, and fears; this fierce and jealous lover; this light-hearted and unsuspecting rival—who of these three slept best that night?

CHAPTER IV.

The Patio of the Smuggler's House—The Conversation—The Black Horse is bought—The ruined Fort.

LOVE has been likened to many things; but there grows a flower in Spain, the very type of that burning and ardent love that had sprung up so suddenly in the breast of Don Juan. The aloe, with its towering yet graceful stem, its feathered tresses, grand yet elegant, surrounded and carefully guarded by its strong and prickly leaves, grows in secret; these are the affections, the passions, and the energies of the heart, developing day by day, until forth bursts the flower in all its beauty and majesty. Then, hour by hour, the leaves decay—pride, affection, ambition, wither, droop, and die; and behold it stands alone, and can never bloom again.

Did Juan dream of Frascita? did Frascita dream of Juan? We know not; but if they did, what a wild and tangled maze must those dreams have been!

Love is not prone to reason, but to hope; the future is all in all; what though the present be as dark and stormy as the hurricane-cloud of the tropics, there is always a little opening through which hope gleams like a sun ray. Thus it was with our hero. Nothing could be more desperate than his love: had he calmly reasoned upon it, he would have seen the fearful rocks and shoals amid which he was sailing; he did not, but let his vessel drive with all her canvas spread, with nothing but love and daring at the helm to steer him through these yawning dangers.

When he awoke, his first thoughts were to see the lovely Frascita again; and with the daring energy of his character, to think was to determine, to determine to act.

As he passed through the dark portecochère of his lodgings, the dusky figure of a charcoal-burner glided out before him like the red Indian of the Far West.

But we must precede our hero to his destination.

The patio, or court of Lope's house, was of the most luxurious description. The pavement, of diamond-shaped slabs of dark green marble from the Sierra Morena, was carefully swept and sprinkled with rose water; in the middle a small, white marble fountain of grotesque workmanship threw small jets of water from a hundred mouths into a porphyry basin, and filled the court

with a murmuring sound. On three sides of the square, raised a step higher than the level of the court, were rows of small marble pillars, green and white alternately, supporting small arabesque or Moorish arches quaintly carved and embossed with gold and azure, in imitation of the Court of Lions; between these pillars were pots of orange-trees and camellias in full blossom, perfuming all around.

A dark awning, stretched over the quadrangle, prevented the glare of the day from entering, and threw a soft and dreamy repose on every thing below.

In this cool and fragrant retreat sat the smuggler and his lovely niece.

The conversation had evidently been interesting, for her dark eye was sparkling with uncommon luster, and a bright blush shone through her transparent skin. What was it that had called the mantling blood into those smooth and peach-like cheeks?

Lope loved his niece: he had no children, and all his affections were centered in her. Engaged in daring and lawless, although successful pursuits, his mind found a delicious repose in her society; she was the haven of his rest, to which he flew from the wild turmoil of his career. Besides, Frascita was an orphan, and had been left to his care by those he once had dearly loved. She herself was a being formed to be cherished—bright, and glowing, and warm as the skies of her own land. No wonder, then, that the bold smuggler dearly loved the gay, the charming Frascita. And there they sat—the dark, tall, athletic, powerful man, with his hair just tinged with gray—and the graceful, elegant, blooming girl.

"Come, *hija mia*, let there be confidence between us—I am going to be your father-confessor to-day. Frascita, you have a secret—and it is now necessary for your good that nothing should be concealed from me. You know this stranger?"

Frascita started, and blushed crimson. The very words the detested Mateo had used—but oh! how different was the tone in which they were uttered—how different the look that accompanied them!

"You need not tell me, if it pains you," continued Lope; "that pretty blush is sufficient: but are you aware, dear niece, who and what the stranger is?"

"Yes, yes, dear uncle; I saw it all when the diligence was attacked. He is a Carlist."

"And you met him at Cordova—is it not so? And you have seen him here—and spoken to him—and he has serenaded you—and you have given him flowers."

Frascita turned her head away, and hid her face in her hands, and perhaps thought that her uncle was a wizard to know all these little particulars.

"How is this, Frascita?" continued Lope; "you do not deny it; it is true, then. There has been great imprudence, but it may yet be set right, if—"

"If what, dear uncle?" said Frascita, looking up, a little reassured.

"You will consent to marry Mateo immediately."

"Never," said Frascita, shuddering.

"Remember—you are betrothed to Mateo; and although you may never have loved him, you have not avoided his presence."

"But, uncle—"

"What, Frascita?"

"I had never seen Juan then." This was said in the most charming, naïve manner possible. Lope took no notice of it, however; but continued—"So you are determined to reject your affianced husband, the choice of your uncle."

"Oh, speak not so—how can I love that dark, that fearful man? you can not wish it, dear, dear uncle."

And she threw her arms round him, and looked up into his face with those beaming eyes. Who could resist that beseeching look? Not Lope. He kissed her forehead gently as he replied, in a softened tone. "Well, well, niece, I will not press it on you; for, indeed, I feel that I can not; but it must not be concealed from you that there are very great difficulties to overcome—that Mateo—"

"Mateo—always Mateo!" cried Frascita, pettishly. "Is he an ogre to frighten children with? Am I not too Andalusian?"

"Yes, yes, dear niece, in every thing," said Lope, looking at her proudly and fondly.

"But, uncle," continued Frascita impetuously, "he threatened me—must I bear that, too? I'm an Andalusian maiden."

"Ha! did he so?" muttered Lope to himself: "he is already jealous, then."

"Yes, yes, he bade me—me, your niece—beware!" And she drew her slender form up to its full height, and sparks seemed to flash from her eyes, as she added, "Sooner than wed him now, I would cast myself over that awful bridge where the Rio Verde dashes five hundred feet below."

"Hush, hush, *hija mia*; we must go with the old adage, 'Fair and softly wins the day.' You must smooth those frowns, which do not become you; and at least receive Mateo kindly and courteously for my sake—for all our sakes."

"Uncle, I will; but, I beseech you, urge me no further on this topic—see—it will kill me."

"I am, then, to understand that you love this Colonel Juan?"

"Love him—do I love him?" said the maiden distractedly. "It is folly—it is rashness—it is madness; but it is now too late—I can not turn back, and I would not."

"Curses on these political differences!" thought Lope: "but for these all might go on well, and Frascita might be happy; but now, whichever way I turn, I see nothing but dangers and difficulties for her—for me—for all of us; but I, too, once loved."

Thus far had the confessions of the Beauty of Ronda proceeded, when a servant entered, and informed Lope that a handsome young caballero wished to see him.

"You had better retire, dear niece," said the smuggler, "as I wish to speak to this caballero alone." Frascita obeyed reluctantly, and with her eyes cast upon the ground, for her heart but too readily divined who the handsome stranger was. Yet, although her uncle wished her to retire, the wish was uttered in so kind a tone that her heart was a little reassured.

Whether she peeped or not, I must leave my fair readers to guess. Could I change my sex, and be in love, I do not know what I should do under such circumstances; but as it is—

The young Carlist entered, and after the usual salutations, his eye evidently wandered round the court in search of something, as he said, "I have come thus early, Señor Lope, as I was most anxious to see you."

"Say, rather, my niece," said Lope, with that kind of a laugh which says "You see you can not deceive me."

"Nay, nay, I did not know that the señorita was your relative before last night."

"Let us be frank with one another, Colonel Juan; this is but at best an unfortunate business, and I will confess to you that I do not see the end of it."

"How is it an unfortunate business? Do you call it a misfortune to love the fairest girl in Andalusia, and to dream of hopes that a mutual flame has been kindled in her breast?—is that a misfortune, Señor Lope?"

"Yes," repeated Lope, calmly, "it is a misfortune, and one that we shall all feel deeply, if indeed it does not altogether overwhelm us."

"I can not see it in that light."

"Lovers never can," rejoined Lope, with a slight sneer. "But, to be explicit, I must point out to you the almost insurmountable difficulties there are to encounter."

"Thank you for those words. I will overcome them all."

"In the first place, my niece, is betrothed."

"Betrothed! and to whom?" fiercely exclaimed Juan.

"To Mateo."

"And who and what is this Mateo, this formidable Mateo, whom you all seem to fear so much?"

"Fear!" said Lope, haughtily: "you are mistaken, colonel; I, at least, fear no man; but revengeful and unscrupulous, rich,

powerful, and commanding, the miller of the Moraima is well known, and proportionably dreaded."

"And to such a man," cried Juan, bitterly, "is the tender Flower of the Sierras betrothed."

"I could not help it," said Lope, remorsefully: "it was her father's dying wish: Frascita is an orphan."

"And does this Mateo love your niece?"

"I fear so—nay, I am sure of it—otherwise gold would have some influence over him, for that he prizes dearly."

"Ha!" said Juan, musingly; this man may be bought, then: this may assist our plans."

"Yes, yes; no doubt the dollars have great weight with him; but in this instance, I fear they will not succeed."

"They must be tried, however. I have funds at my disposal, which—"

"I know, I know, my friend," interrupted the smuggler; "but this is not all. You are suspected already, for I know that you are watched. What your life is worth, if you are discovered, you well know. This war to the knife has made men savages: if it were hinted that you were a Faccioso—pardon me, colonel, for making use of the word—a file of the guard, a few loaded muskets, fuego, and what are you? Forgive me, my friend, but I wish to impress more caution on you. You have trusted yourself in my hands, and you are now bound to me by a dearer tie than I dreamed of; for he who has Frascita's love has mine also; and she has confessed to me that she does love you: I am therefore bound more than ever to watch over your safety. I have given out that you are a friend of mine from Almeria, engaged in a vast smuggling business (the safest character, by the way, to assume), and that you have come up to the fair to purchase horses, and for such you must condescend to pass for the present. But again I warn you, colonel, to beware of Mateo. I do not think he will betray you; but if his jealousy is aroused by discovering that you are his rival, he will stop at nothing for revenge. But come, colonel, let us go and look at the fair before all the horses are bought."

Juan seemed reluctant to stir.

"No, no, not now," said the smuggler, laughing; "I understand you; but business first, pleasure afterward. Do not forget we have to meet the padre."

"But one moment."

"Not now, not now; after the bull-fight."

"But one word."

"No, no; it will unfit you for the conference; you will be quarreling with Mateo."

Juan yielded with a bad grace, grievously disappointed at not seeing his charming mistress; but still Lope was her uncle, her guardian, so they went out together.

The fair was held on a plain, or table-land, just outside the gates of the town, where a fort, now in ruins, once threatened destruction to the Eagle's Nest.

Wild-looking, gaunt cattle with huge-spreading horns, stood there, lazily flapping the flies off with their tufted tails; black pigs jostled, and grunted, and squealed horribly; horses, with their long, thick tails carefully rolled up, and tied in huge knots, filled the air with their shrill neighing, and pawed the ground impatiently.

As they passed through the throng, Juan noticed that many men, dressed as muleteers, peasants, and charcoal-burners saluted Lope in a peculiar manner, and passed on without speaking; and among the groups standing chaffering and gesticulating vehemently round some long-tailed haca, individuals would suddenly cease talking and give the same salute. So frequently did this occur, that Juan could not forbear from remarking it to the smuggler.

"They are my sons," replied Lope, laughing. "I have a large family, Colonel Juan; you will see more of them by and by—and here comes one."

The smuggler made a sign to a little, swarthy, active, merry-looking fellow, gayly dressed in a zamarra ornamented with silver flagree buttons, a yellow sash, and gayly-worked botines, a cigarillo in his mouth, a cachiporra in his hand, and his peaked velvet hat, with a gay silk handkerchief underneath, cocked on one side with a jaunty air. As he came up to them, he made a low bow to our hero, and his little black eyes twinkled with a cunning expression.

It was his friend the muleteer of Cordova. Had Juan looked round before, he might have seen this man following them at a little distance; and it was he who had watched the charcoal-burner.

"Is it all right, Pepe?" said Lope.

"You are watched," briefly responded he.

"By whom?"

"By him you know of."

"Ha! I must see after this. I must leave you for a short time, colonel. Keep up the character. Pepito will be your guide; you may trust him."

So saying the smuggler turned away, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"Well, my merry little friend of the Sierra Morena, what part are you playing in the comedy?" said Juan, addressing his old companion.

"Sancho Panza, señor," replied Pepe, grinning.

"How so?"

"I wait on your excellency."

"Ha! ha! I am Don Quixote, then! But where is my Rosinante?"

"That is just what I was going to observe to your excellency. Will it please you

to look at the horses? You will want a good one, take Pepe's word for it. There is such a haca here; he belongs to a friend of mine; he is of the royal breed. The English officers want to get him, but you must buy him. He is an entero—black as the night—fast as the wind—active as a goat—gentle as a lamb—tame as a dog. Such loins!—such a back!—such legs!—such a shoulder! He can carry twenty arrobas, or I am no judge of horseflesh. Come and look at him—this way, señor—you must buy him."

So saying, the chattering, but faithful muleteer bustled through the crowd to where a noble-looking horse was led up and down in a circle of admiring lookers-on.

The horse was in a white foam, and his nostrils seemed to breathe fire; he had been running a race with an officer's horse from Gibraltar, and the excitement was intense, for he had won it. His present owner, a tall, dark, swarthy, gaunt man, seemed to regard the animal as a second Baveca. Juan inquired his price. Every eye was immediately turned on our hero.

"Tres ciento duros," proudly replied the owner, patting the horse on his arched neck; not a peseta less."

Juan hesitated for a moment.

"Buy him," whispered Pepito, eagerly; "on the honor of a mountaineer you will want him."

Whispers now began to circulate among the spectators: "It is certainly he." "Who is he?" "The stranger who killed the bull."

"Buy him," again whispered Pepe, still more eagerly, as two or three of the crowd plucked him by the sleeve, and pulled him aside, curious to know who Don Juan really was.

"Oh, he is a friend of the Señor Lope, from near Almeria—a rich man—something in his line, too," promptly replied Pepe.

Juan hesitated no longer; he saw that the people's curiosity was aroused, and that the sooner he escaped observation the better for his personal safety: he was not sorry, moreover, in his situation, to possess so excellent a horse. The bargain was promptly struck, and the noble animal was dispatched under the escort of its late owner to the smuggler's house, the admiring crowd still following him.

Left to themselves, Juan and Pepito strolled onward toward the ruined fort, and sat down amid the crumbling brickwork. Both were silent for a long time, our hero occupied with the picture of his mistress standing at the moonlit window, and the little muleteer not presuming to speak until spoken to.

"By the by," said Juan, suddenly. "do you know any thing of Mateo, who is called the Miller of the Moraima?"

"Do I know whom?" almost shrieked Pepe.

"The Miller of the Moraima."

"You are jesting, señor; every one knows him."

"Tell me what you know of him."

Pepe got up and looked cautiously round, peeping behind the broken walls to see that no one was lurking near; and coming close up to Juan, and speaking almost in a whisper, he said, "Some say that he is a demon; others, that he has a spirit in the dark Moraima that provides him with money, and turns aside all weapons, bullets and all. I don't know, for my part, what to think of all that; but this much is certain, he is as cunning as a fox, fierce and savage as a bull in the ring, rich as an old Jew, spiteful and revengeful as a gypsy; he hears every thing—he knows every thing; sometimes I think that the air whispers tales in his ear. Is it possible, señor, that you don't know Mateo? There was the little, red-haired arriero of San Roque, whom he shot on the Alameda for speaking lightly of him; how, in the Virgin's name, he found it out, without this spirit of his told him, nobody knows: that's one;" and he went on, counting on his fingers. "There was the barber he stabbed for cutting a little piece out of his chin when shaving him: that's two. Is it possible that your excellency does not know him? Then there was the English officer he knocked on the head for jostling him on his horse in a narrow path: that's three; but he got the worst of that. Then there was—"

How many more atrocities he would have enumerated does not appear, for Don Juan interrupted him suddenly by springing up and darting out of the fort.

"Esta loco por cierto," cried Pepe, jumping up, and following him.

As Lope was entering the town he met Mateo. Their greeting was apparently as friendly as usual, but a close observer might have perceived that each was playing a part.

"Well met, Lope," said Mateo; "I was looking for you—I have some news for your ear alone. I have just heard from the coast—the Felicidad has run her cargo safe, and she is waiting for orders at the mouth of the Guadiara."

"Is that all you came to tell me, Mateo?"

"No; I was in the Fonda de la Reyna just now, and I heard some of the officers saying that Gomez, with a considerable force, was somewhere in the neighborhood, and that the people were leaving the villages, and flying to Algeiras and Gibraltar; and that the authorities here were getting very jealous, and were going to examine all strangers; and that rumors were flying about of emissaries from Don Carlos being in the town. So I came to warn you of it; but there will be no danger of a search, nor in-

deed of any inquiry being made, until the bull-fight is over."

"I agree with you, Mateo. I do not think there will be any risk to-day; so we can have our meeting; nobody will betray us; we are too well known. But thank you for your friendly warning; I will see to it to-morrow. Still, if you could find Padre Tomaso, and bring him to the venta in about an hour, it would be as well."

"I saw him only a few minutes ago in the town; he is in a terrible fidget; and I really doubt whether he will come at all; he is but a cowardly priest."

"I think you are mistaken in that, Mateo. The priests are brave enough when working for the aggrandizement of their order, or even for their own advantage; and this is more especially their cause, and I think we must make it ours, too. What say you, Mateo?"

"It is nothing to me, Lope," said the miller, carelessly, "who wins, as long as they keep at it; while they are fighting, and cutting one another's throats, we run our cargoes safely and easily; that is my view of it; so, for the present, I am for the weaker party. If the woman beats the man, our trade will soon be knocked on the head. So, viva Carlos Quinto, the good friend of the contrabandistas, say I. But this Colonel Juan, what are you going to do with him? He has made himself too conspicuous, and the people are beginning to inquire who he is; Diego Costa and Colonel Sandoval asked me, just now, if I knew any thing about him."

"Indeed! and what did you say?"

"I told them that he was a friend of yours, come from the coast to see the fair; and hinted at another possible attraction—the Flower of the Sierras."

"What mean you, Mateo?" said Lope, sharply.

Mateo replied, in a careless manner,

"Oh, I thought it would put them on a wrong scent; they could not tell, you know, that he had not seen this rose before; he might have met her at Jaen, at Cordova, at a hundred places."

"He knows all," thought Lope. "Juan must depart at once."

Mateo watched keenly to see the effect of his words on the countenance of his friend: his friend! But not a cloud flitted over the placid calmness of his look as he said, "It was not a bad idea of yours, Mateo. Will you come in and see Frascita?"

They were now at the porch of the smuggler's house, which, it may be remembered, stood near the French gate.

At that moment the black charger was led up; and his late owner, recognizing Lope, told him that he had brought the horse according to direction.

Lope motioned him to say no more, for

he well knew who had bought the horse, having himself instructed Pepe to make the colonel do so; but he thought that Mateo did not. He therefore gave the *haca* in charge to a servant, as he said, "What do you think of him, Mateo? Have I made a good purchase? He was dear, too—three hundred dollars is a long price. Will you come in?"

"No, no, not now; I have business in the town; I will try and find the padre, and bring him with me to the *venta*—*hasta la vista, Lope*;" and the miller hastened away.

Lope entered his house in deep thought; he paced up and down the patio hurriedly, muttering to himself, "There is not a moment to be lost—Juan must fly—but where? It would be madness for him to enter the town again; he must try and rejoin Gomez, or get on board some of the smuggling craft on the coast, and so get to Gibraltar. I and my niece can join him there, that's true; but how to deceive Mateo; he is gone now, no doubt, to lay his plans—I can see that he is meditating something—but I will forestall him. The black horse must remain; he guesses, no doubt, who has bought him, and for what purpose, and he will have his spies at the Gaucin gate, and they will suspect something if I send the horse on. What is to be done? I can not—I must not—let this gallant youth perish; and Frascita, too—what will become of her should anything happen to her lover? I know her well, and fear for her. Still I fear that he can hardly get out of the net—something must be done—I will not delay a minute." Lope called a servant.

"Perez, are any of the men here?"

"Yes, señor, there's El Tuerto and Bartolo, of Medina, smoking in the stable, looking at the new horse."

"Tell them to saddle two good *hacas*; to get ready for the road immediately, and to take their *escopetas* with them. But stay—send El Tuerto here."

El Tuerto, or the one-eyed, was a tall, gaunt, fierce-looking Andaluz; but he belied his appearance, for he was a good-humored fellow enough, with a strong propensity to *aguardiente*, and a man of few words.

"Well, Tuerto, do you want to earn an *onza*?"

"Without doubt, señor."

"Then listen to me. Take Bartolo, and two good horses, and set out at once for Gaucin. You know the small olive-grove before you come to the pass where the soldiers are?"

"Si, señor."

"Stop there until Pepe, the arriero, and a stranger join you; give up the horses to them, see them past the soldiers, and then you can either come back or go on to Gaucin; perhaps it will be better to go on. Take

your *alforjas* with barley for the horses, and some food for yourselves; you may have to wait. Do you understand me?"

"Si, señor,"

"Start at once; here is something to make the road seem short."

"Ah señor, you know the way to do it; nothing greases the wheels like gold."

"Off with you; and if you do this well, another *onza*."

Fortunately for our hero there was no delay, and in half an hour the two horsemen were clear of the town and clattering over the stony road.

Having dispatched these auxiliaries on their errand, the smuggler bethought himself of his niece; accordingly he went to seek her.

What passed between them I shall leave my readers to surmise; but in a few minutes a tall man, rather past the middle age, and a graceful female figure, with her face concealed by a large, dark mantilla, might have been seen issuing through the French gate, and directing their steps toward the ruined fort.

This was the apparition that had so suddenly startled and aroused our hero, and interrupted the loquacious Pepe.

I shall not attempt to portray the rapturous eagerness of Juan, nor the pretty blushes of Frascita, at this sudden and unexpected meeting, although my little guide expatiated warmly on the beauty of it; nor shall I relate what passed between the two lovers amid those crumbling walls. It must have been sadly and sweetly interesting, no doubt, loving as these two did, to meet and part again so soon. But hope is true love's true friend, and wreathed round their young, fond hearts might have been found this motto, "Hope on, hope ever."

While these two were exchanging vows of eternal constancy, the kind-hearted smuggler had withdrawn outside with Pepe. As he stood there, giving the arriero his final instructions, a charcoal-burner approached, and gave Lope a scrap of paper, on which was written, "It is as I told you; the padre is a coward; he will not meet Colonel Juan until it is dusk."

"Return to your master, and say we will wait," said Lope to the messenger, whose keen eyes seemed to wander restlessly about in search of something he did not see, but expected to find; and he walked away evidently disappointed.

"This is a scheme of Mateo's," said Lope to the faithful muleteer, "to make sure of the colonel waiting until night at least. It is now high time that he should start; he ought to be twelve hours, at the least, in advance of any pursuit. I doubt whether the authorities here have any suspicion of his being a Carlino; still Mateo is capable of any and the worst treachery, now that his

jealousy is aroused. My niece has had time to explain every thing; they must part: it is a pity, too, so young, so handsome, and so loving a pair; but perish he must if he remains. I can neither save him nor conceal him; his only safety is flight to the coast, and that immediate. Are you ready to go with him, Pepe? You have been faithful to me, my friend; will you be so now?"

"I am yours to the death, and what would I not do for such a three?" replied the little arriero, earnestly. "Trust me, Señor Lope."

The smuggler turned into the ruins.

"Forgive me, colonel," said Lope, kindly, taking the young Carlist's hand in his, "forgive me for interrupting you. It is time you should go; you have a fierce, implacable, bitter enemy, for he has discovered all; delay is dangerous, and an hour has been already lost."

"Oh, yes, dear Juan, fly, I beseech you," said the maiden, imploringly, and at the same time, firmly: "oh, do not linger here; we shall soon meet again."

The young Carlist hesitated; overwhelmed, for a moment, by the idea of losing her he loved so tenderly, his senses reeled, and he leaned against the wall for support. Before he could recover himself they were gone; and yet the fragrance of a kiss rested on his lips—all that was now left to him of the Pride of the Sierras.

He started up to overtake them, but paused, and sunk down, half stupefied and unconscious, on the crumbling ruins; his limbs did not move; but his eye followed the graceful form of his darling mistress, until it was lost amid the crowd, and, even then it seemed to trace her, so fixed, so eager was his gaze. Thus, a second time the lovers parted. Will they ever meet again?

CHAPTER V.

The Flight from Ronda—The Venta at the Mouth of the Guadaira—The Smuggling Craft—The Chase—The Escape.

READER mine—for one, I flatter myself, I shall have—were you ever in the Zoological Gardens?

Did you ever notice a queer-looking animal covered with armor, in a large wire den?

Watch him, and you will see him scuttling about, here and there, out and in, round about and round about, so fast that the eye can scarcely follow his motions.

I am afraid my tale is very like the Armadillo. But we will leave these labyrinthine wanderings, and for the present follow our hero in his flight.

Ronda! What a beautiful name it is,

when it comes full, round, and soft from the mouth of a Spaniard! What a strange, romantic, wild, indescribable spot in reality! This Eagle's Nest stands, as it were, on the comb of a mountain-crest, flanked on both sides by hideous rocks and awful precipices.

The town is divided into two parts by a deep and yawning chasm, the sides of which are smooth, and as, if polished by the hand of some mighty giant. At the bottom of this abyss, over which is thrown a mighty bridge, rush the foaming waters of the Rio Verde, which, dashing from the sierras, finds its way amid grim chasms and over headlong precipices until it reaches the valley below, cutting the town in two, and turning, in its descent, numberless mills.

To reach the Gaucin road from where we left our hero, without passing through the town, would seem impossible to a stranger. Difficult and dangerous it is, but not altogether impracticable.

The young Carlist remained a few minutes, as if bowed down by the weight of his loss. But his was an elastic and hopeful temperament; dashing, as if ashamed of his weakness, the unbidden drops from his eyes, he sprang on his feet and bade Pepe lead the way. Leaving the plain, Pepe struck into a narrow winding-path, which seemed to end in a precipice; but by scrambling, and sliding, and jumping from rock to rock, lowering themselves over fearful places, where the least slip would have been fatal, and at which Juan, as brave as he was, could scarcely forbear from shuddering, while the active little mountaineer only laughed, they arrived safely amid the broken gardens in the valley beneath the town. Around huge black rocks, over sparkling water-courses and bubbling brooks, through orange and olive-groves, amid rose-beds, patches of Indian corn, pomegranates, geraniums, and stately aloes—a very chaos of gardens—the little arriero threaded his way until the valley of the river was crossed. Then, climbing up a path as precipitous, rugged, and rocky as that by which they had descended, Juan found himself unexpectedly on the wished-for road.

It was now within an hour of noon, and although it was autumn the sun shone out with a fierce intensity. Scarcely a soul was stirring, for the Rondenians were enjoying their siesta during the midday heat.

A solitary sentinel stood gaping and gazing with a lazy, lack-luster eye over the parapet; but he took no notice of the fugitives.

Fear was no ingredient in the disposition of our hero—he had never even known what that feeling was; yet his heart beat more freely, and the air seemed lighter, when nothing was visible save the mountain and sky.

Busied with his own train of ideas, he followed in silence his trusty guide. "They would meet again. Gomez had kept his

word, and ere long would be master of Andalusia. She would see him as a victor, not as a lurking spy." Such were the leading thoughts of his buoyant mind.

Castle after castle arose in the air and vanished away, as his thoughts dwelt upon the future. Happy prerogative of lovers! what would ye do without these airy creations of your wanton brains? Is there one among you all that hath not built some such gorgeous fabric in his waking dreams? If such there be, go crown him, Dullness, with a leaden crown, for his name is Apathy.

Briskly the two walked on for nearly two leagues under the glowing sun, yet neither spoke; Juan building his castles in the air, and thinking of that parting kiss; Pepe humming snatches of songs and smoking his cigarillo, alternately. They reached the olive-grove. Pepe whistled shrilly, startling our hero from his blissful revery. The whistle was promptly returned, and El Tuerto and his companion issued from the shadow of the trees, leading the two hacas.

They gave our fugitives this confused, though welcome intelligence: a goatherd had informed them that the soldiers had been withdrawn from the pass some hours before, and that Don Carlos was coming, with a large army, to take Gibraltar.

Juan and his guide mounted.

Made happy with a handsome present, the two smugglers turned back toward Ronda, as their errand was done, and no soldiers were on the road.

The sun had set in a cloud of glory, and the darkness was creeping over mountain and over valley when the travelers arrived at the little open town of Gaucin.

To their great surprise this usually quiet little place was alive with men. Soldiers, in all the ragged variety of Spanish uniform, might be seen, by the dull light, dragging guns up the steep cliff toward the old Moorish castle; Peseteros and Miguelets were cleaning and preparing their escopetas in the open streets; officers were shouting, women talking and screaming, dogs barking in concert—all was confusion and uproar; cries of "Mueran los Facciosos!"—"No quarter to the dogs!" "Viva Christina!" "Viva la Constitucion!" menaces, onths, boastings, passed from group to group, from individual to individual.

"We can not stop here, that's certain," said Pepe; "we must push on, though these cursed hacas are getting tired."

Juan assented, saying, "I am entirely in your hands; do what you think best."

Such was the bustle, such the confusion, that very little notice was taken of our travelers.

Some of the men recognized Pepe, and spoke to him; but as it was no unusual thing for him to pass by at any hour either

by day or night, they gave him only a passing salutation, or an invitation to come in and drink a glass of aguardiente. In reality there was little or no danger; for the hubbub was so great, and the consternation, notwithstanding their boastings and preparations, so widely spread, that every body was thinking and taking care of himself; it only wanted a real alarm to scatter them like sheep before the wolves.

The fugitives, however, dismounted, and led their jaded hacas through the long and ill-paved streets, and down the tremendous hill on which Gaucin stands.

Fortunate it was for our hero, as the sequel will show, that the alarmed state of the people had scared the travelers away from their halting-place.

At the foot of the hill, a little removed from the road, there was a venta, beautifully situated in a grove of orange-trees: lights were gleaming through the windows and from the open door; this, too, the fugitives could see, was filled with wild-looking soldiery.

Digging their sharp stirrup-irons into the flanks of their tired horses, they cantered sharply past.

The noise brought several of the soldiers to the door; shots were fired at random—the bullets whistled harmlessly by, and the figures of the fugitives were soon lost in the increasing gloom.

When they pulled their horses into a walk—no difficult matter, by the by—Juan, although his situation was any thing but agreeable, again breathed freely.

There is always a strong reaction of the mind when a man, however brave, has escaped from a danger that appears imminent. What warrior is not glad when the battle is over? What sailor does not rejoice when the storm is past? Does not even the huntsman feel it when he has safely surmounted some dangerous leap? But, above all, when the earth has rocked under the feet, when the mountains have been bowed down to the valleys, when the crash of falling cliffs, and the rattle of the earthquake have sounded in the ear, then the moment that convulsed and heaving Nature has resumed her tranquillity, does not the blood rush circling again through the veins? does not, as it were, a new life reanimate the fainting heart? New dangers may arise, but this is past and gone. One escape seems the pledge of future deliverances.

The night was dark, although the moon had risen; for a dense mist hung all around the horizon. The air was quite still, and a few stars twinkled faintly overhead in the murky sky; there was no sound save the splash of the horses' feet and the hoarse, booming croak of the bull-frog, as Juan and his guide followed the winding track along the shallow brook, amid the dark oleanders.

Myriads of fireflies flitted around the bushes—

"Like bright thoughts flashing o'er the gloomy soul."

Midnight had passed, and a heavy, dank fog hung campy and drearily over the Guadaira, as, leading their jaded horses after them, the fugitives approached the sea-shore,

"Hist, señor; this way, come to me," cried Pepito; "I have found the ford; this way, this way."

Juan joined him.

Pepito now went on in his rattling manner, for his tongue was at length loosened.

"I don't think we shall have any carabineros here to-night; if there should be any, we need not fear them; they know me, and the Señor Lope pays them well, so they won't interfere with us; they will think that we are on some smuggling business—so we are, so we are, I forgot that—to smuggle your excellency out of the country. What say you, then, Señor Juan, will you try the venta? We must have something to eat; this traveling is hungry work."

"Wherever you please to go I will follow you, my trusty guide," said Juan, dejectedly.

"Well, get on your horse again, señor, and we will cross the river."

The venta stood amid a grove of chestnut-trees, near the bank of the Guadaira. It was a long, low, one-storied building, with a large mule-shed attached to it, and a spacious stable. All the windows were strongly defended with iron bars, and the doors were of thick oak-plank, heavy, and clamped with iron. The building was divided into three compartments: the kitchen, if I may so call it, a small intermediate room for travelers to sleep in—that is if the jumpers and the creepers would let them—and an inner chamber, which the family occupied.

Now, although it was past midnight, the door stood wide open.

Three or four huge dogs of a large lurcher breed rushed out, barking furiously, and seemed determined to oppose the entrance of the strangers. Pepito jumped off his horse and called to them, "Down ye devils, down; don't you know me?" At the sound of his voice they began to smell round him; then, hushing their clamorous tongues, whined, and fawned, and jumped on him.

Patting their heads, the arriero entered the venta, beckoning to Juan to keep behind him.

Before the charcoal fire two tall, athletic young men were seated smoking.

Beside them stood a table, with an earthenware jar of wine and glasses upon it.

As they turned round, the arriero, on whose swarthy face and dark figure fell the dull glare from the fire, made a sign, crossing his arms in a peculiar manner.

"What! is that you, Pepecillo?" cried one, jumping up and embracing him: "I

thought you were up in the sierras with the Señor Lope."

"So I was, so I was; but is all right here? I have a friend with me."

"Carajo! A friend! Who is he? Is he one of us?" said both together.

"He is a friend of the Señor Lope," promptly replied the arriero.

"He is welcome, then; bid him come in."

Juan entered, and saluted them.

One of the young men then went out, and put the tired horses in the stable, and fed them. On his return, he inquired how far they had come, that the hacas were so jaded.

"Don't ask me any questions," said Pepe, laughing; "it's no use, for I won't answer them."

"But look you here, Pepecillo mio," replied the one who spoke last, "there is business on hand to-night; the stranger must take the oath. Hark ye," and he whispered in Pepe's ear, "the Felicidad is lying off the mouth of the river, and her cargo, at least part of it, is in there," and he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at the inner room. "The women are packing it at this moment; the riders will be here presently: they won't like a stranger."

"Mira usted, mi amigo, that is the very craft we expected to find here. We want to get on board her: is there a boat in the river?"

"Yes, down in the creek which runs up the marsh below. You know it; she is hid among the reeds."

"When does the little craft sail?"

"Not until to-morrow, if not meddled with; but they say there that that cursed guarda costa brig is off the coast."

"Yes, I saw her a few days ago at Marbella."

"The devil!"

"But the carabineros?"

"They are all out of the way—all called off; have you not heard the news? Gomez, with his army of brigands, is near the Guadarranque; some say he is on it."

Juan drew near to listen: this was great news for him.

"Come, come, caballeros," said the other man, "enough of this. Let us drink a safe voyage back to the blessed little Felicidad; and hark ye, Pepito, if your friend is not to take the oath, let him at least pledge us in a glass of vino tinto."

So saying he filled four glasses from the jar that stood on the table, and handed one to each.

Then they all four stood up, and jingled their glasses together.

"Long live the trade," shouted he who had proposed drinking the toast.

"Vivan los contrabandistas," replied the other.

Again the four glasses were jingled to-

gether, and the two burst out into a rough, wild song—

Yo qui soi contrabandista,
He tobacco y aguardiente,
Y mi muger, y my cavallo,
Felix que soi yo.

Which may be freely translated—

I, who am a smuggler bold,
Smoke and drink, and count my gold;
I've a horse and pretty wife,
Don't I lead a jolly life?

Just as the chorus died away, the clattering of horses' hoofs on the loose stones sounded through the still night-air.

"Here they are; let us welcome the jolly fellows," cried the first speaker, jumping up. "But, no: in with you among the women; but, mind, no quarreling or love-making, or we shall have a jabbering like a hen-roost with a rat in it: in with you."

Juan and the arriero entered the inner room, where three women, two of whom were young and rather pretty, were busily employed unpacking bales of cotton and woolen stuffs, and making them up into smaller packages fit for the road.

Only one of the women took any notice of the strangers; they were well accustomed to all kinds of concealment. She was coming forward to welcome Pepito, but he stopped her with a sign.

Presently, as the wine took effect, the noise and mirth in the outer room became fast and furious.

"This will never do," whispered the arriero to Juan. "I know them: they'll be for making you take the oath presently. When the wine gets into their heads, son demonios; so let us slip out gently and try and find the boat. I know every inch of the ground, but it is very soft and treacherous: so take care, señor, and follow me close."

There was a small door at the back of the women's apartment.

Pepe made a sign to the girl to open it; she did so, and they slipped out noiselessly. It was pitch dark.

Groping their way in silence through a tangled brake, where the stunted wild myrtle, the juniper, and the alder filled the black, moist intervals between the sand-hills, forming a dismal and unwholesome swamp, the abode of the rabbit and the red-legged partridge, and crossing, at the expense of many a severe wetting, sundry muddy and stinking ditches, Juan and his guide reached the creek.

After a lengthened search, during which the arriero did not mutter less than a hundred oaths, they succeeded in finding the boat. There were no oars.

At that moment, gleaming faintly over the sand-hills, a light far out to seaward showed itself for an instant. A low report, as of a distant gun, followed.

"Carajo!" exclaimed Pepito; that must be the guarda costa signaling. It is evident we can not stay here, and the Felicidad will be off."

"If we can but get the boat out into the river, she will drop down to the sea with the current," said Juan.

"It is evident, señor," replied Pepe, impatiently, "that you don't know this stupid river: there is only a narrow channel where even a light boat can float; without oars we should ground. Besides, the mouth is like a mill-race, and not much wider; and then there is a bar. Carajo! What is to be done?"

As the arriero moved about impatiently, he struck his foot against some wooden object. "Ha, ha! What a ninny I was to suppose they would leave them in her!" exclaimed Pepito, joyously; "here they are, here they are."

Juan and his guide got in, and, peddling quietly down the creek, reached the river, which here spreads itself over its shallow bed to a width of nearly two hundred yards. As they approached the mouth, it gradually narrowed, the sand rising high on both sides until the water fell like a sluice.

The boat, steered by a skillful hand, shot rapidly through the opening, and reached in safety the broken water outside.

Nothing could be heard but the gentle splash of the little waves on the smooth and sandy beach, except the shrill scream of the gulls, the cry of the plover, and the whistle of the sand-larks, as they flew off started from their feeding-place.

"Rest a moment, señor," said Pepe, when they had crossed the bar, as he leaned over the gunwale of the boat and looked steadfastly along the surface of the water. "I don't see her yet, but she ought to be hereabout: I must try the signal, though I don't like it. But here goes."

Taking his knife from his sash and a flint from his pouch, and stooping down till his hands were nearly level with the surface of the water, he struck several sharp, bright sparks from the flint.

"Look out, señor."

Presently, right ahead, a few dancing lights, like the glimmerings of the fireflies, appeared for a second through the calm, dark atmosphere.

"That's her at last," cried Pepito, joyously. "Give way, señor."

Presently the dim outline of a felucca rose as if out of the sea, heaving gracefully to the gentle swell, and a voice came over the calm water.

"Quien es?"

"Gibraltar," promptly answered the arriero.

"Y pues?"

"La Felicidad."

"All right," said the voice from the felucca; "come on board."

"Stay a moment, señor: just hold on while I speak to the captain," said the arriero, as he sprang into the felucca. In a few minutes he returned.

"It's all right, señor; you may come on board. I explained your situation to the captain, adding that you were a friend of Señor Lope—his name is a passport. 'Ah,' said he, 'this caballero is your friend, and is unfortunate; that is quite enough for me, I don't want to hear any more.' Between us two, Señor Juan, I think el capitan hates the Christinos, although he is no Spaniard."

As Juan stepped on board he was kindly welcomed by the captain of the smuggling craft. "You are running a great risk, señor," said the Genoese. You have come on board at an unlucky time: I can not sail until to-morrow, and there is a queen's vessel off, and I fancy she is on the look-out for us. You see it is calm now—we are embayed; and though the sweet little vessel is as swift as a bird, she may cut us off or disable us; and then seven years' at least hard labor in the works of Ceuta—curses on them!"

"And if I stay on shore it is death—perhaps the death of a dog," said Juan, bitterly.

"Well, well," replied the captain, kindly, "don't be cast down, señor; we will give them the slip yet: I've had many a touch-and-go escape in my time, and I'm twenty years older than you, so be easy; you have not run your time out. But you are cold and wet; come below."

Indeed our hero, though with a frame and a constitution of iron, was nearly worn out with hunger, cold, wet, and fatigue; so that, after refreshing himself, notwithstanding his dangerous and unpleasant situation, and harassing thoughts, he slept long and soundly.

Juan was awoke by the report of a cannon. When he went on deck the Felicidad was still at anchor. A thick, white veil of mist or fog rested on the sea as far as the eye could reach; but over the land and overhead the sky was clear and blue, a few fleecy clouds passing at intervals toward the east. Presently the report of another gun boomed through the fog to seaward.

The captain was on deck, watching the sky intently. In a few minutes he called to his mate, and said, "Get the anchor up at once, I can not wait any longer; we shall have the west wind soon, and the fog will lift: in with it, but with as little noise as possible."

Then turning to Juan, he said, "Good morning, señor: it is as I feared; the wind is coming off the land, and it will be all clear directly. The guarda costa has kept her station during the night, and I have no hesitation in saying that it will be touch-and-go with us; so, if you like to land again—"

"No, po," answered Juan, "any thing

but that. I would sooner work all my life in chains, or be blown up with you into a thousand pieces, than stand the chance of being shot like a dog, with that traitor Mateo looking on." The Genoese was startled at his vehemence, but added, kindly, "Well, well, caballero, I do not give in without a struggle, you may depend upon it. These fellows have an old grudge against me. I have foiled them so often, and I should not like to fall into their hands, so I'll e'en go and get every thing ready for a run."

Juan, left to himself, anxiously watched the appearance of the changing skies, as the captain had done. Presently he heard the splash of oars—a boat dashed through the opening and came alongside, and Pepe jumped on board: the boat put off again immediately.

He came up to Juan, and said, in his quick, rattling way, "You are in luck, señor, for once in a way, it seems. We just got out of that in the nick of time. I went back to the venta in the boat after you had turned in, on a little business of my own. I slipped in by the little door; one of the girls, the pretty one you saw, bade me hold my tongue, pointing with her finger to the next room. She told me that there were seven or eight carabineros inside. It seems that they were in search of you, for she heard them mention your name, and 'faccioso,' 'muerte,' and other words of that sort: so I told her—she is a sweetheart of mine—to try and get one of her brothers away to take me off again, and bring the boat back; for, Señor Juan, I would not think of deserting you—and here I am."

Juan thanked him.

"No thanks, señor; next to the famous Lope and his charming niece, you have my esteem. What was I saying? Oh, leave a woman alone to manage a delicate affair, but don't ask her questions. I had to wait; but, at all events, here I am. It seems, however," added the arriero, earnestly, "that they have all got a hint of your being on board the Felicidad: still, I can not understand how they know it."

"It is Mateo's work; but I will repay him for it yet, if I escape," said Juan, savagely.

By this time the anchor of the smuggling craft was weighed, and the huge lateen sail loosened, and all ready to hoist. The men manned the oars, and the sharp little vessel glided ahead through the smooth water.

A light and gentle air began to creep off the land.

The huge yard was promptly swayed aloft, and the sail set.

Presently the fog rolled upward like a semi-transparent white curtain from the surface of the sea, and vanished in the air. The bright Mediterranean suddenly appeared glowing in the sun's rays; and there,

about three miles distant, lay the gun-brig, with her white glistening sails still idly flapping against the masts.

The scene was truly beautiful.

At the northern extremity, or horn of the bay, the Sierra Vermaja, rising abruptly from the sea, and trending away toward Malaga, shone in the sunlight with a bright vermilion flame. The smooth and placid sea seemed on fire; while on its glassy bosom, at various intervals and distances, the forms of large vessels reposed, still and motionless as if painted on canvas; every mast, every sail, every rope, was reflected in the polished mirror of that lovely sea. To the south the vast towering rock of old Calpe arose in mighty grandeur, its summit still crowned with a wreath of mist. Landward were frowning cliffs and broken rocks rising over the sandy beach, and mingled with bright green verdure and purple heath. And here and there a white, round tower stood as a watchman on the heights. Beneath these, several dusky figures could now be discerned moving busily to and fro; these were the carabineros, attracted by the firing.

"You see those men moving about there," said the captain to Juan, pointing to the shore; "that is no doubt what the guarda costa was signaling for: but there must be something out of the way, or they would not have taken even the trouble to show themselves."

"It seems," said Juan, "that I am fated to bring trouble now on all I have any dealings with."

"Never mind about that, señor, but look at the brig yonder. See, she has got the wind at last—there, her sails fill—she will, no doubt, edge in upon us and drive us under the fire of the men on shore, or force us on the rocks; but depend upon it," added he, squeezing Juan's hand in his, "I am not the man to give it up easily."

The Felicidad now began to move rapidly through the water, creeping along the shore. The sea was perfectly smooth, only rippled by the freshening west wind that came sweeping down the ravines and gullies, bearing on its wings the perfume of the flowers.

The guarda costa and the Felicidad were both on the same tack, with their heads nearly to the southward; the former lying rather closer to the wind, and edging in shore to lessen her distance; the latter sneaking along about a quarter of a mile from the beach, but going freer, and, consequently, faster through the water.

The Genoese took off his broad-leafed hat, and, crushing it between his hands, cried out in an excited state, "All now depends on what practice she makes with her popguns. The water shoals gradually, and they are too deep to come very near. I don't think they like or will try close quar-

ters with their boats; so, if they don't succeed in winging us, we shall give them the slip yet."

"I can not see how it is possible!" said Juan, inquiringly.

"Oh, easily enough: if we once get inside the English lines; I'll beach her if we have to swim for it. They dare not take us then, the redcoats won't let them."

The guarda costa edged in nearer and nearer the shore; and although she did not sail so fast, having less distance to go, she still kept her relative position. She was soon within a mile of the gallant little smuggling craft.

"Look out for yourselves, men," cried the Genoese, sharply; "I see her foresail lift: under hatchways all of you, but the mate and myself."

Five jets of flame, five white puffs of smoke, broke suddenly from the side of the brig, and the shot came hissing and ricocheting along the smooth surface of the water; but all fell short or wide, while the echo reverberated in low murmurs from the distant hills. "Bah!" said the captain, contemptuously, shrugging his shoulders.

Presently a running, spattering fire of musketry came from off the shore; yet, although the bullets whizzed and sung over their heads and around them, not a man or rope was hit. "Keep your powder and balls, you fools, for the Carlists," growled the captain.

Shot after shot now came from the gun-brig, which was still nearing the Felicidad.

"A little better that," remarked the captain, as a round-shot went hissing nearly over their heads, and cutting a round hole in the small, triangular sail that served as a mizzen. Still no damage of consequence was done.

As the hills became lower and the ground more open, the wind increased in force and steadiness.

The rapidity with which the sweet little craft now foamed through the rippling waters soon distanced the carabineros on shore, with the exception of a few horsemen, who still kept up an irregular and unsuccessful fire.

But the water deepened, and the brig still edged in upon them, nearer and nearer. "Luff, you may," said the captain to the mate, who was steering. "We must shoot our water more; never mind those popguns from the land."

Still they could not shake off the gun-brig, which kept up an incessant fire from her guns.

But the Felicidad seemed appropriately named—she appeared to bear a charmed life; for with the exception of the shot through her mizzen, not another ball had struck her, though several had pitched into the sea so close as to throw the spray on to her low deck.

"Heave the gun overboard: we shall draw less water without it, and she will feel all the livelier when it is gone. It's no use with this big one; we must trust to our heels."

The men promptly obeyed the order, and, with a heavy splash, the twelve-pounder sunk beneath the waves.

The chase had now lasted upward of an hour and a half, and the *Felicidad* was within three miles of the English lines, dashing swiftly on.

Suddenly the guarda costa ceased firing. The water had shallowed again, and she was obliged to stand off a little.

"We shall do it yet," cried the captain, in ecstasy, rubbing his hands quickly together; "look over the sand-hills yonder, toward the rock, señor; do you see those dark lines—how steady they move? Those are the pickets from the garrison. Ah, those are the boys for me."

Suddenly a cry from the mate caused the Genoese to turn his eyes to the brig. He turned pale.

Several dark little balls were being run up to the mast-heads; then they unfolded to the breeze, and showed small triangular flags of different colors.

"What the devil is she signaling for now?" cried the captain, his exulting tone all gone.

"I am afraid," replied the mate, "that it must be to the other guarda costa from Algeiras; she must have heard the firing, and will cut us off. There she is, by all the saints in the calendar," added he, as a sneaking, low, lateen-rigged vessel appeared suddenly rounding the northeastern end of the rock.

"It is she," muttered the captain, with a deep oath; "we are doomed at last: what a fool I was to throw the gun overboard!"

For a moment the Genoese appeared to have given up all hopes of escape in utter dejection; but, suddenly rousing himself, he said, "Who knows what guns she carries?"

"I know," replied the mate; "only one traversing twelve-pounder forward."

"I'll do it, if she blows us out of the water; better that than be taken," muttered the captain. "What say you, my men; shall we give the sweet little craft up?"

"No, no," cried the crew, one and all; "she is in your hands; do what you like."

Their escape, however, seemed utterly hopeless: if they ran out to sea, it was into the jaws of the gun-brig; if they stood on, it was only to meet the armed felucca; if they ran on shore, they could hardly escape the carabineros.

The captain took the helm. His teeth were clenched, his brow contracted, his eye was set, and he grasped the tiller with an iron grasp.

He stood right on.

A storm of bullets from the laud fell around, over and under him. The gun-brig still fired at intervals, but with the same bad aim. The lateen craft came boldly down straight on toward the *Felicidad*, as if she would run her on board.

The captain steered as if he meant to pass to windward of the felucca; and so they came down on one another rapidly. When about a hundred yards off, the felucca luffed up into the wind, and shivered her sail as if to throw herself right across the bows of the smuggler, and hailed her to surrender.

No answer was given.

Her gun, loaded with grape, was then fired; but they had checked her way too soon; the muzzle was depressed too much; and the whole charge struck the water close under the little bowsprit of the *Felicidad*. They were now nearly touching.

"Vaya usted con Dios!" shouted the Genoese, as he put the helm suddenly up, and at the same moment slacked off the main sheet. The quick little vessel, answering like lightning to her helm, shot by to leeward within twenty yards of the felucca; and before her enemy was woe round, the gallant smuggler had increased her distance, and was well ahead of her pursuer.

Several vessels that were back-strapped (as it is called) in the bay behind the rock had stood in, probably to see the fun, and between two large ships the Genoese steered the *Felicidad*, thus avoiding the fire of the gun-brig.

Suddenly, as if recovering from her previous confusion and stupidity, the felucca again hauled her wind to cut off the smuggling craft from Gibraltar; and, regardless of the neutral vessels, fired on, but with as little success as before.

Like a mountain hare before the grayhounds the *Felicidad* dashed on; but the felucca seemed to gain on her as the wind came in powerful gusts over the smooth plain of the Neutral ground. But it was now too late.

Suddenly, by a mighty third power, the tables were turned—the giant spoke and bade the contest cease.

For from the towering rock a twenty-four pound shot came hissing over the felucca, and plunged into the sea to leeward, throwing up the water in a sheet of foam.

The echo rolled like thunder, reverberating from cliff to cliff; and ere the sound had died away the fortunate *Felicidad* was safe from further pursuit under the shelter of her mighty protector.

Sneaking along under the shadow of those vast heights, the smuggling craft, with an English ensign hoisted, as if in derision of her pursuers, rounded Europa Point, and was soon anchored safely in the bay.

CHAPTER VI.

The Gipsy Horse-dealer and the same Miller.—The Hell—Los Hermanos de Lamala.—The Terms are agreed upon.—The Fonda de la Reyna and its Host.

HAVING left our hero and his faithful guide safe under the guns of the redoubtable fortress, we must retrace our steps over the stony mountain-road, and hasten back to Ronda.

Scarcely had the horse-dealer quitted the smuggler's house, with a light step and heavy purse, when he felt a tap on the shoulder.

Mechanically his hand sought the handle of his long knife.

Turning round, he saw Mateo.

He drew his hand away as if the knife had burned him.

"Dost thou know me, friend?" said the miller, fixing his basilisk eyes on the horse-dealer's countenance.

"I beg your pardon Señor Mateo," said the other, trembling; "I did not know who touched me; but when I have money about me, the hand goes to the knife naturally."

"I would speak with you alone: follow me."

The horse-dealer obeyed; but his knees shook, and his teeth chattered, as he thought of his dollars and the awful character of him he followed, his mind naturally enough coupling the two together. But he was mistaken.

They reached the end of the Alameda; and the miller, seating himself on the same bench which he had occupied the evening before, signed to the horse-dealer to sit by him.

Then, fixing his eye on the shifting and wavering countenance of the other, he said, in a low but fierce voice,

"Now listen to me: I know you; you are a gipsy."

The horse-dealer started, and made a gesture of denial.

"Do not deny it; that is useless."

"No, by the blessed Virgin!"

"Pshaw! Gipsy or Christian, you stole that horse."

"But, señor—"

"Silence! and listen to what I say, and answer my questions simply—do you hear?—and truly: gold if you do, a prison if you do not. Dost thou not detest our race?"

"It is our creed."

"What wouldst thou do to a rival who robs you of your mistress!"

"I wear a knife."

"Dost thou love gold?"

"I am a gipsy."

"And hatest a prison?"

"I am a gipsy."

"Dost thou love a good horse?"

"Next to my mistress."

"Wouldst thou regain what thou hast

stolen and sold, without paying the price back?"

"It is the fashion of the Calori."

"Are you to be trusted?"

"Pay me well."

"You shall wreak your hatred on our race, you shall have gold, and the noble black horse again, if you will do my bidding. But beware! my arm is long, and the spirit whispers in my ear the name of all who play me false. Now, answer me again: Wouldst thou know him again who bought your horse?"

"What! the handsome stranger?"

"Curses on him! yes, that is the man."

"'Tis half a pity, too; so young, so handsome, and so open-handed!"

"Pshaw! are you a driver? It is a safe venture; he is a Carino; he would restore the Inquisition; more reason for hatred, to a gipsy!"

"Why not denounce him?"

"Silence! What is that to thee? But know this: if a syllable—a single syllable is breathed of me or any of my people having any concern in this, you die! There must be four of you, for he may not be alone; at least he will have one man with him as a guide."

"And they who accompany him?"—

"Must be spared, if possible. Have you any companions who can be trusted?"

"Yes; there are the three brothers from Lamala, who robbed the Englishman near Loxa; they are only rateros; if well paid, they will turn their hand to any thing, if but paid."

"Can you find them now?"

"Yes; but they will not stir for me, until after the bull-fights; but for you—"

"Fool! they will know me," interrupted the miller, savagely.

"Pardon me, señor; you can speak to them without being seen; they are strangers, and will not know your voice if there should be occasion for you to speak; I will vouch for you."

"You!" said Mateo, with a contemptuous sneer—"you vouch for me? Ha, ha! the gipsy vouches for the Christian! But, lead on, thou spawn of hell! if there be aught of trickery or deception in thy dealings with me, thy life-blood shall answer for it."

So saying, Mateo rose from his seat.

Could the miller have seen the expression of the gipsy's countenance at that moment, where hatred, revenge, and evil passion were struggling for mastery with cupidity and cowardly fear—

"Letting I dare not wait upon I would,"

he might have changed his purpose.

Little did that man of blood imagine that his designs had been foreseen, and his plans already anticipated; that from the spot he had that moment quitted, within a short hour his hated and successful rival might

have been seen threading his way through the broken gardens, almost beneath his very feet.

He went to seek his destruction, and he left him free.

The horse-dealer led the way along the Alameda, across the bridge, into the market-place; then turning down a narrow, steep, and ill-paved street, he stopped opposite to a large shed, full of mules and borricos. At one end of this was a door which opened into a dark and filthy stable; this, too, was full of horses, all huddled together.

"This is the place, señor," said the gipsy; "will it please you to enter?"

"I see nothing," said Mateo, impatiently, "but a filthy stable."

They entered, however; and the gipsy, closing the door after him, and speaking to the hacas to keep them quiet, crept along behind them to the farther end of the stable, the miller following him in silence, with his hand on his knife.

The gipsy pushed open a small door which opened inward into a narrow room, the floor of which was strewn with sacks of barley, saddles, alforgas, and other horse-trappings. No light entered this dismal hole, except what stole in through the chinks of the door that opened into the mule-shed, and that was barely sufficient to make the darkness visible. Stepping over the barley-sacks, the horse-dealer showed Mateo a small iron grating let into the wall, and concealed by bridles and other horse-gear hanging down before it. The bars were close together, and crossed each other from corner to corner. It was like the grating at a convent, only smaller, and no light shone through the interstices; in fact, it appeared an old window now built up.

Suddenly the door shut to, apparently of its own accord, and all was utter darkness.

Mateo's suspicious disposition was immediately aroused, and he turned suddenly round to seize the gipsy; but he had disappeared. He groped about, stumbling as he did so over the saddles, but in vain. He tried the door; it was fastened, and there was nothing to pull it open with. Had the horse-dealer dared to play him false? His faithful charcoal-burner was outside—that he felt assured of, for he had seen him following them through the market-place. Should he call out? No; he would wait. As these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, Mateo heard a slight noise, as if of something drawn gently over a smooth surface. A gleam of yellow light darted through the grating, and a villainous smell of garlic and tobacco followed, mingled with a sound of muttering voices and obscene oaths. The miller could see between the bars of the grating the contents of the horrid den.

A solitary flaring candle stood on a table

covered with a cloth which had once been green; but it was now so begrimed with dirt and grease, that only here and there the original color peeped out, like grass on a muck-beap. A pack of cards, even filthier and greasier than the cloth, lay scattered about the table. The floor, walls, and ceiling were as black as age, smoke, and dirt could make them.

There was one stool near the table, and a rickety bench stood along the wall; but the only occupants of these were some small glasses, flanking a large, green earthenware jar, which probably contained that horrid compound, aguardiente flavored with aniseed.

The room was lofty, though small, and there was apparently no mode of ingress or egress; and the only means of ventilation seemed to be the grating through which he surveyed this pandemonium.

The miller rubbed his eyes with astonishment, and muttered a suppressed oath. He could not be mistaken. There, sure enough, was the gipsy standing amid a group of four ferocious-looking ruffians, and speaking to them earnestly and with much gesticulation in an unknown language.

Three of these suspicious-looking gentlemen were dressed exactly alike, in coarse, brown serge jackets, with the cuffs, points of the elbows, and small of the back, slashed with pieces of gaudily-colored cloth; short trousers of the same stuff, and edged with blue, reached only to a little below the knee; a broad, red, coarse woolen sash was wound in many broad folds round their waists; soiled botines and untanned-leather shoes completed their costume. But, strange to say, although the rest of their dress was filthily dirty, their linen was white and clean. Their forms were short, thickset, and very muscular. Their dark and ferocious faces were shaded with huge black whiskers, and their coarse hair fell in long elf-locks from beneath their conical hats. It was no difficult matter to see that they were brothers, and easier still to imagine that they would not scruple to commit any atrocities if paid for.

The fourth personage was even more remarkable for the savage and cunning expression of his features. But as he has nothing to do with my story further than being the proprietor of this hellish abode, and banker at the monté table, I shall not enter into any detail, merely remarking that he was smoking his paper cigar apparently in a contented mood; and no wonder, for he had just plundered the three rateros of their last peseta.

For some minutes they all talked together, and their oaths and filthy language, although in strict keeping with the place, grated harshly even on the miller's ear; so we will not offend our more delicate reader with them.

"Carajo; no! I tell you," said one, in Spanish, turning away to light his cigarillo at the candle; "I, for one, will not move until the last bull is killed and drawn out."

"Nor, I," said another; "I have bet a hard dollar that the green ribands kill more horses than the pink. I must stay and see it out."

"Nonsense!" said the horse-dealer, impatiently; "would you lose a chance like this? throw away fifty pesos duros a-piece for a bull-fight that you can see at any time? Nonsense! Get them first, and then you can go, sit in the shade, and bet away."

"He is right," said the third; "curses on the cards! I have not a peseta left to pay even for a seat in the sun."

"Besides," continued the gipsy, "it is a safe and easy business—no trouble in life to men like you."

"I tell you I will not go," said the first speaker, sullenly. "The bulls came in last night like a whirlwind. They will fight like devils to-day."

"And who will pay my bets, or receive them if I win?" said the second.

"You have not a peseta between you," said the horse-dealer, exchanging a rapid glance with the banker.

"José will lend us some," cried all three.

"Not a real; not a single ochavo," said the keeper of the hell. "You are a parcel of fools. Go and earn some."

"He is right," said the third: "we must have money."

"I will tell you something that will make you go," continued the gipsy. "The Englishmen you robbed are here, and they will be at the bull-ring; what will happen then?" (This was a lie, but it suited his purpose.)

"Carajo!" exclaimed all three in different keys.

There was a pause, and then a whispering together.

"Who is he that wants the job done?" inquired one.

"That is what we want to know," said another.

"They are right," said the third. "And what are we to get for it?"

"He is rich enough to pay you well; that is enough for you to know. Will you do it?"

"The terms, let us hear the terms," cried the three in chorus.

"Listen, now, all of you, and José shall be witness: fifty dollars a-piece; all that is on him, and they say he has hundreds in his sash (this was true enough, although the gipsy knew nothing about it, yet the lie, he thought, would tell; nor did they say anything about the black horse, for that he reserved for himself as his peculiar booty): now will you do it? Speak out like men, and don't shilly-shally any longer about it. Come; say Yes at once."

The three robbers consulted for a moment; then, all speaking together, they cried out "Yes! yes! yes! we will! we will. The oath! the oath! the oath!"

The miller heard no more, for something slid rapidly over the grating, and he was again left in total darkness.

Five minutes passed away, and doubts began to arise again in Mateo's mind concerning the gipsy's faith. He could hear nothing but the deadened sound of the horses champing and moving about.

"I am here, señor," said a voice close beside him; and at the same moment the door opened, apparently of itself.

"Are you content with me now?" continued the gipsy, in a cringing manner. "Have I done well?"

"Don't stand jabbering there, but get out of this infernal hole," said the miller, savagely. "Pah, I am half stifled with the smells of this cursed den—it will take a whole bottle of Tinto to wash my throat out! Out with you, gitano, conjuror, horse-dealer, robber—whatever you call yourself!"

Again that strange expression passed like the shadow of a cloud over the gipsy's countenance—again his cunning eyes gleamed with a sudden fire; but when the light of the glowing day, which penetrated even to that narrow street, fell on his swarthy features, no trace was left of angry passions—on the contrary, his manner was servile and fawning, like that of a well-flogged hound.

Before they quitted the shelter of the stable, the miller's keen eye glanced up and down the street. A charcoal-burner of short stature was sauntering along toward them with a lazy step, smoking his cigar, and not another soul was visible. The miller beckoned to him, and, when he was close by his side, whispered in his ear, "Trusty one, in ten minutes at the Fonda de la Reyna: I suspect him—do not lose sight of him for one moment. You are the mastiff; watch: if he runs rusty, bite."

And, without deigning to say another word to the horse-dealer, Mateo walked away toward the market-place, leaving the gipsy and the charcoal-burner face to face; and a pretty pair of babes they were.

It would be impossible to give in readable English the conversation which passed between those two worthies; for of all slang the Spanish is the most untranslatable, and unfit for decent ears.

As the horse-dealer had no intention of levitating, at least for the present, he thought he might as well ingratiate himself with his new companion by treating him to an olla and a bottle of Malaga; to which the charcoal-burner, as it was not contrary to his instructions, readily consented. So they adjourned to a wine-shop in the market-place.

The Fonda de la Reyna was the most

frequented, if not the most respectable in the town.

It had a neveria, where you might obtain that most delicious beverage, agraz (the unfermented juice of the unripe grape); this, iced, and qualified with a little spirit, forms a nectareous, but I believe unwholesome, drink. The saloon was a large marble-paved room, the ceiling supported by numberless small pilasters of dark-green marble. In this cool retreat you might smoke and drink, play at dominoes, or rattle the balls about on a noisy billiard-table, with pallillos in the center and bells in the pockets.

There of a morning might be seen some of the most famous toreros: the accomplished Montes and his brother-in-law, El Barbieri, the stalwart Pinto, and the undaunted Munseca.

There also resorted the flower of the contrabandistas, the heads of the police, and the officers of the garrison—a strange mixture, though all in perfect keeping with the state of Spain.

When the miller entered, the principal topics under discussion amid this motley group were the relative merits of the different breeds of bulls (the Salamancan, the Tarifan, the Widow's, having each its strenuous supporter), the stranger, and the Carlists.

The host of this remarkable inn was a notorious smuggler; and it was surmised, although people were too prudent to declare it openly, that he was engaged even in a more lawless pursuit. He was playing at billiards when the miller entered. A glance passed between them, unnoticed by the lookers-on. The game was soon lost.

"What can I do for you, Señor Mateo?" said the host.

"Have you any news from the coast?"

"Si, si, it is all right; the Felicidad has run her cargo safe."

"So I heard," replied the miller, impatiently.

"What will you take?" said el amo, significantly, seeing Mateo's impatience.

"Have you a private room? I expect somebody here directly, and I want to speak to you before they come."

"Come this way, then, Señor Mateo: a bottle of my old Val de Peñas will do you no harm. It is as bright as a ruby, and as fragrant as your mistress's breath."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mateo, savagely, the words of the innkeeper kindling anew the fire in his breast, like dry cedar-chips thrown on a smoldering wood-fire.

The host saw that he had unwittingly touched a tender spot, and wisely said no more, but led the way into a small private room, and, placing a bottle of that glorious wine on the table, with a couple of glasses, he waited for the miller to speak.

"You know *Lope de la Vega*?" said Mateo, abruptly.

"Yes: who does not?"

"You have dealings with him?"

"Yes, a bale of tobacco, or so."

"He is playing me false."

"Is it possible? I thought he was as true as steel."

"Ay, true to himself, not to me. Curses light on the traitor! He must be got out of the way for a short time."

"That will be a difficult job."

"It must be done, however. Can you not devise some plan?"

"I, señor?"

"Yes, you; can not you forge some lie, coin some tale, or—"

"The *Señor Lope*!" cried the host in amazement, understanding the diabolical gleam of the miller's eye: "no, no, that will be too dangerous; he has too many friends here. The people all love him; smugglers, bull-fighters, robbers, carabineros—even gipsies dote on him."

"Nay, nay, I meant not that—it would not suit my purpose now: it is only for a day or two."

"Lope is kind-hearted; can you not work some way or another on his feelings? May there not be some vessel seized, some dear friend of his taken—yourself, for instance?"

"By the spirit of the *Moraima*, that is the very thing! What a fool I was not to think of that myself! Lope was right; I am not so cunning as he is. Fill me another glass of your ruby wine, my jolly host. I drink a health to your idea. Lure the fox away with carrion—send him to save a dead man—ha, ha! excellent, excellent!"

The innkeeper started; for, naturally enough, the train of ideas that was working in Mateo's brain was utterly incomprehensible to him, even with the help of the words spoken. He saw that there was some plot, but dared not ask for an explanation; for, like the gipsy, he was afraid of the ferocious miller when in his presence.

"Yes," continued Mateo, speaking as if to himself, "lure the old bird away, the young one is caught easily enough: but let us to business; have you writing materials?"

The innkeeper went to fetch them.

While he was gone Mateo drank glass after glass of the rich and generous wine as he thus communed with himself, speaking aloud:—

"It can not fail; *Frasquita* is mine—mine. Yet, perhaps I am but a jealous fool, and she does not really love this stranger. No, no; those tears, that scream, that moonlight meeting, those flowers. No: may the fire of hell scorch his marrow!—she loves him. Beware, beware, *Frasquita*: love and hate go hand in hand, and revenge follows. Thus will I sweep my enemies away, thus will I drink their blood like wine, and dash them to pieces, and crush them beneath my feet—

thus—thus;" and he suited the action to the words.

"He quaffed off the liquor, and he threw down the cup,"

and ground it under his heel.

Presently the host returned, but not alone, for the gipsy and the charcoal-burner were with him. The liberal potations of aguardiente that the horse-dealer had imbibed during the last ten minutes had given him what is generally called "Dutch courage," and he actually stood in the presence of the miller without trembling. Mateo was in a glorious humor; he bade the host bring another bottle, made the gipsy and the charcoal-burner sit down, and filled their glasses. He then wrote the note mentioned in the fourth chapter, and dispatched his trusty envoy to deliver it to Lope, and to watch what the young Carlist was doing: if satisfied that no movement was contemplated, Manolo was to return, and see the four robbers depart on their errand.

This done over the mantling bowl, in a gay and laughing tone, the fierce miller proceeded to give the gipsy his final instructions.

About five leagues from Ronda, on the Gaucin road, there is a long and gloomy defile where the night-hawk flits about even in the daytime. As the traveler emerges from this, the mountain path, sweeping round a deep hollow, presents a singular spectacle. Huge masses of dark rocks, pinnaced like castle turrets, tower above him, while below there yawns a deep and abrupt precipice. A solitary aloe, with its stiff and prickly leaves, stands as a sentinel at the end of this deary pass.

There the horse-dealer and his colleagues were to await their intended victim. If he came alone, no firearms were to be used; the deadly knife was to do the work: otherwise the gipsy was to use his own discretion.

Filling a bumper of the generous wine, the miller drank success to the enterprise, and the gipsy departed on his errand.

Satisfied with what he had done, and elated with the wine he had drunk, Mateo sought his own house to enjoy a comfortable siesta, and refresh himself, during the heat of the day, for the bull-fight in the evening, little imagining that his intended victim was already beyond his reach.

The miller had already committed two great errors in playing his game: he had finessed too much with a vastly superior player, and shown his cards to too many people.

Scarcely had he left the fonda when another man left in the same direction that the charcoal burner had taken.

Manolo departed on his errand, and, as we have related, gave Lope the note at the ruined fort, and there he was foiled.

As he returned toward the fonda, he sauntered into the court-yard of Lope's stables, as if to look at and admire Bavieca (for so we will name the black horse), but, in reality, to obtain any information he could from the smugglers who might be loitering about.

There was no bustle or sign of any thing stirring. Several men were lying on the straw, wrapped in their cloaks, with their heads pillowed on saddles, asleep or smoking.

He peeped, with his prying, cunning eyes into the stable; Bavieca was there, quietly munching his barley, and flapping the flies away with his long, bushy tail.

Manolo was soon satisfied that no immediate flight was contemplated, although his mind was full of that species of low cunning that suspects every thing, and which was so invaluable to his fierce employer. He was to Mateo what the pilot-fish is to the shark, the jackal to the lion—at least, if we may believe those pretty tales that are written about these animals.

Quitting the yard, Manolo threw himself at full length on one of the stone benches under the dark archway which opened into the street from the patio of the smuggler's house, and lay there quietly, as if asleep. For nearly half an hour no one came; at length his patience was rewarded; for a tall figure whom he easily recognized, and a female sobbing audibly, entered. Coming out of the bright glare into the deep shadow of the arch, they passed into the court without noticing him; he waited some time longer, but no others came. This puzzled Manolo. It was evident enough that the smuggler's niece had accompanied him to the ruined fort, and that they had gone there for some purpose; the Carlist must have been there, too, concealed among the broken walls. But what had now become of this stranger? Like a baffled hound the ruffian had lost the scent, and to regain it he started up, and was about to leave the shelter of the archway, when he heard footsteps coming in the opposite direction, and the host of the Fonda de la Reyna appeared in the broad daylight.

He, too, passed the charcoal-burner, apparently without seeing him, and entered the house.

Another half hour went by, and no one quitted it.

"There is treachery somewhere," muttered Manolo, as he darted rapidly up the street, and went straight to the fonda.

Mateo was gone, the gipsy was gone, and there was the host playing at billiards, just as if nothing had happened; he had just made a carambole, and knocked down three or four pall-balls; but his own ball rolled slowly on into a pocket, and the little bell tinkled.

"Ha! ha!" said he, laughing, and as if

he had not seen Manolo; "that was a capital stroke and well intended, but I am caught in my own trap."

"Carajo!" exclaimed the astonished trusty; "I thought I saw you in the street just now, señor amo."

"Ha! ha!" replied mine host, still laughing, "is that you, my worthy? That Val de Peñas has a wonderful effect upon the eyes; it gives people a double sight: here is a proof of it."

"Psha!" exclaimed Manolo, impatiently; "do you take me for a child?"

"By no means, my friend; you have, no doubt, cut your wise-teeth; but old wine plays strange pranks."

"Mateo shall know of this," hissed the charcoal-burner between his teeth.

"Of what? Of my losing a grand stroke?"

"A thousand devils, no; but of your being a traitor."

"Go and take a siesta, Manolo: never go out in the sun when you drink: it deranges the brain."

With a horrid imprecation the charcoal-burner rushed out of the fonda.

The host quietly resumed his game.

CHAPTER VII.

The Charcoal-Burner is foiled—The Uncle and the Niece—The Bull-Ring—Lope and Frascita leave their Mountain Home—The Aloe is reached—The Death of the Smuggler—Frascita! What will become of her?

MANOLO, in a furious rage, went straight to his employer's house. Mateo was asleep, and no one dared arouse the dormant lion before he was thoroughly refreshed, not even his favorite charcoal-burner.

Excited and baffled, he rolled himself in a manta, threw himself on the floor, and tried to sleep, but in vain, for he began to find himself in a dilemma. The mysterious movements of the host of the fonda showed but too plainly that they were betrayed. The absence of the young Carlist was suspicious; even the quiet that reigned about the smuggler's house might be a blind. He had lost sight of the stranger, and he might escape while he was lying there. Every moment lost was dangerous to their plans, and, minute by minute, the dollars were dropping from his pouch. Manolo felt all this keenly; but so terrible was the temper of his employer if suddenly aroused, that he knew not how to act. He arose twenty times, and as many threw himself down again in vexation. Should he awake the miller and tell him what had occurred—there might be nothing in it after all; and then—what then?—he shuddered at the idea: it amounted to this—should he brave the danger of Mateo's rage, or lose his reward?

He knew the place on the road appointed for the gipsy and his gang, but he was uncertain whether they had yet set out. A thought struck him—he would act for himself: if he was successful, the dollars would flow freely into his pouch; and if he should fail, he would at least be out of the way of any sudden ebullition of anger.

His first object was Lope's house; there, still, all was quiet. He wandered out to the cattle-fair, and peeped into the ruined fort; there, too, he failed, for it was empty. He re-entered the city, and went straight through it to the Gaucín gate, and at a venture entered into conversation with some of the soldiers who were loitering about; and from them he learned that a one-eyed and a two-eyed man had passed through about two hours before, but neither of these answered the young Carlist's description.

He learned also that the gipsy and the three brothers had gone out of the town, but they were on foot. The black horse was in the stable—the young Carlist could not have escaped as yet. Manolo, again baffled, was about to return; but chance, or something else, prompted him to stay. He lit his cigarillo, and sat down on a bench outside the guard-room. Presently he heard one of the soldiers call out—

"Hillo, my friend with the one eye, what have you done with your horses?—sold them, eh?"

"The Facciosos have got them," cried another. "The dogs scared you so that you tumbled off and ran away on foot. Vaya, is it not so?"

"No, no," said El Tuerto, laughing; "I leave that for you brave soldiers."

"Fairly answered, by Santiago," said a sergeant; "if you were not so ugly, I would ask you to drink some *aguardiente*."

"And get the blind side of me," said the one-eyed, moving on: "¡a Dios, amigos—take care of yourselves, the Carlists are coming."

Suddenly the whole truth flashed on the charcoal-burner's mind. They had been duped—stupidly, easily duped. For the first time he remembered the path by the gardens. The absence of the stranger was now accounted for—he had escaped—the gipsy and his gang were too late—fresh fuel for Mateo's fury—it must find vent—what direction would it take? The inn-keeper's visit to Lope—that was the channel into which it must be turned.

While Manolo, like an *afrito*, was prowling about, meditating and planning evil against the human race, alone in the marble court sat Frascita.

Soft and mild as the gentle trade-wind, which scarcely ruffles the bosom of the heaving ocean, is love when all runs smoothly on. But should a cloud arise, and darken heaven's blue expanse, then, like the

fearful hurricane, it sweeps over the agitated mind, and leaves a shattered wreck behind.

The maiden's overwrought mind, which had so nobly borne up, and insisted on her lover's flight, was now filled with a thousand agitating thoughts, doubts, and fears. Hers was not the tempered sorrow which slowly wastes away the drooping form, but the wild, impetuous rush of the mountain stream, which, swollen by the melted snows, despises all control. That meeting, that parting, had filled her heart full of burning and unquenchable passion. He was her first, her only love, and she an Andalusian maiden. What was the world now to her without her Juan?—a blank, a dreary waste. Yet the atmosphere which surrounded her seemed full of his presence, and the babbling splash of the fountain murmured his name incessantly, and her bosom heaved tumultuously as she recalled to her mind his tale of love. The tears ran down her pallid cheeks, and she clasped her little hands together as fancy presented to her imagination the dangers and difficulties of his escape. Oh! how she longed to be with him, to partake of his sufferings, or rejoice in his triumphs! Poor Frascita! Thy cup of woe is filling rapidly, but it has not yet overflowed. Weep on.

So occupied was the maiden with her own sad thoughts, that the minutes flew unheeded by, and she was not aware of the presence of her uncle. Lope, who had not long before parted from the host of the fonda, stood there silently watching the deep affliction of his lovely niece: those burning tears confirmed the resolution he had already made. He called her softly by her name—"Frascita."

She looked up, and smiled through her tears.

"Do not grieve so, dear girl; all will yet go well."

"I can not bear this," sobbed the maiden. "Would that I had never seen him."

"Are you too agitated to listen to me, dear niece?" inquired Lope, tenderly, kissing away her tears and embracing her fondly. "Sweet one, can you undertake a long and tedious journey?"

Frascita lifted up her drooping head, and, pushing back the long, lustrous tresses which shaded her lovely countenance, looked hopefully yet wistfully into her uncle's face.

The sudden change of expression, the ray of hope that gleamed in her tearful eyes, spoke more than words could convey; but she replied, eagerly, "Yes, yes, dearest uncle, even to the end of the world."

"That's my brave girl; we will leave this before daylight to-morrow: they want to part us—shall we not prevent them? I have friends at Gibraltar, and no plots or treachery can touch us there: besides, a

little bird has whispered in my ear that Frascita's thoughts are already traveling in that direction. What say you, then, niece of mine—will you go with me?"

The maiden blushed deeply, but did not speak.

"But Frascita, what will Mateo say to our flight? for such he will call it."

"O, uncle!" exclaimed Frascita, shuddering, "that fearful man! does he go with us?"

"The Virgin forbid! He has deceived me, and I trust him no longer."

"How has he deceived you?" inquired the maiden, quickly and eagerly.

"Be not alarmed, dear niece; in trying to trick me, he has overreached himself. Your handsome Carlist is safe enough. Now go and rest yourself; dry those tears, and put on a smiling countenance. We will go to the bull-fight this evening. Show no symptoms of grief or agitation; but flirt, coquet as usual, and shine forth, as you are, the Pride of the Sierras."

The sun has passed the meridian; the morning is gone—the evening is approaching with her softening influence.

Behold Frascita, more brilliant than ever, in the crowded bull-ring, the admired of all. The gallant matadors saluted her; the water-carrier heaved a sigh as he presented a sparkling goblet of *agua fresca*; the hardy mountaineer gazed on her with a look of affectionate pride; a murmur of admiration passed among the rugged soldiers; strangers, as they went by, stopped a moment involuntarily to look on such dazzling loveliness—they could not help it—homage to beauty is natural to the heart of man; there is a spell on it that nothing but an ascetic can resist.

Mateo sat by her side. What were his feelings? Could he prevent himself from drinking deep, burning draughts of love? No; but the chalice was poisoned.

Admiration of her person filled his veins with a fierce, uncontrollable passion.

She smiled on him, and that smile pierced his very vitals. All scruples, if he had any, were removed. She must be his—all his, his alone. Their eyes met; he absolutely gasped for breath. The bulls entered unheeded; the pastime he most delighted in went by unnoticed. A mist veiled the people, the ring, the combat; he saw but her alone—but behold, it was through a sea of blood.

Lope, too, was there, splendidly dressed in the *Majo* costume, and conversing gayly with those around him, or apparently watching the vicissitudes of the fight; now applauding some daring feat of the toreros, or some desperate charge of the enraged bull, as he overthrew both horse and rider. But the agitation of the miller did not escape his notice: he saw those eyes fixed on his niece with an expression that he could not mistake.

He saw, too, that Frascita was acting her part to admiration; yet he feared that she would not be able to sustain it long under such an ordeal. He knew not what a woman can endure when the suffering is for love. Poor maiden! and was it not torture to appear gay when all was sad within; to smile on one she hated, when those smiles ought only to be wretched for one, how deeply loved? She saw him—him, her hero, again subduing with his noble courage and matchless skill the dreaded bull; but she felt at the same time that Mateo's eye was riveted intently on her; and, strange to say, this sustained her courage. No moisture suffused those sparkling eyes; they seemed positively to glitter with the brilliancy of diamonds: nor were her cheeks pale; but a blush, soft as the reflection of a damask rose in the limpid water, came and went flickeringly, like the pinky lights in the northern sky. The clear, ringing laugh, the gay tones which seemed to flow spontaneously, low and soft as the flutterings of the aspen, reassured her uncle. Could this be the drooping maiden lost and overwhelmed in sorrow and in tears?"

Thus, while the wretched horses, mangled and bleeding, were falling victims before the sharp horns of the savage bulls—while they were running their allotted course only to sink beneath the keen swords of the matadors, the Fates were busily weaving the threads of the future career of these three.

Who in all that dense, that gay and laughing throng, could have surmised what was passing in their minds? There was but one, and he a dirty, shabbily-dressed little man, sitting in the sun. But this man scented blood from afar, as the vulture is said instinctively to know when and where a battle is to be fought. The last bull has fallen—the soldiers have filed off—the ring is filled with a crowd, which slowly and gradually dissipates through the thronged gateways.

The Pride of Ronda, surrounded by a group of admirers, moved like a queen of beauty amid them all. She beckoned to Mateo with her fan, and bade him, in a low, soft whisper, keep by her side. They left the bull-ring together.

One by one her admirers dropped off, as they fancied they saw in the miller a dangerous and successful rival; and they were left alone.

"See how they melt away like snow before the summer sun, Frascita," said Mateo, bitterly; "when I am seen with my betrothed they fear me—but you do not, my Frascita!"

"Hush, hush, Mateo; this is not a time for fine speeches," said the maiden, laughing.

"Frascita, but one word—will you be mine?"

"It is not fair, Mateo, to urge me now.

I pray thee, no more love-making. I am in too gay a humor for it. When the soft moon is shining on the silver stream, and the birds are charming the night with their song, then a tale of love sounds pleasantly, but not in a scene like this—it is a mockery now."

"Do not trifle with me, Frascita. I see how it is—you despise me."

"No; I tell you no, Mateo. What a fancy! You are jealous, it seems; but, believe me, I do not despise you." And she spoke the truth, for we never despise what we hate.

"But you do not love me."

"How tiresome you are this evening!"

"Give me an answer, Frascita, dear Frascita, I beseech you."

"I should belie my sex were I to do so to-night, after what I have already said; so you must wait patiently, like a faithful and devoted lover."

Could Frascita have divined that the fate of her uncle hinged upon her words, how would she have answered?"

The miller gave her in reply one of those fierce, expressive glances from his serpent-like eyes, but urged his suit no further.

That look haunted her all that night, and, no doubt, haunts her still if she is alive, although she knew not then what it meant.

The miller escorted Frascita to her uncle's house, but would not go in, and bade her farewell in a broken and husky voice, for he loved her with all the love that his nature was capable of.

Before he reached the Fonda de la Reyna he had recovered. The miller was himself again, savage, implacable as ever.

He found, as he expected, Lope there; and, drawing him aside, so as not to be overheard, said, "Lope, I have just heard that a Carlist chief has been taken by the soldiers on the Gaucin road; can that be your friend the colonel?"

"Holy Virgin, is it possible?" replied the smuggler: "I was wrong, very wrong, to suffer him to go alone."

"So he is gone, then, and it may be true?"

"Yes, he got suspicious, and would not stay."

"Rather, that you were afraid of the attractions of your lovely niece."

"You have partly guessed it. I was anxious to get him away from this; his attentions to her might have attracted notice, and you know well that it would have endangered his safety. But he must not perish if I can assist him."

"Oh, it may not be true after all," replied Mateo, carelessly; "I for one do not believe the report."

"Why not?—nothing can be more probable. What can be done for him? Stay, I am well known; my presence may possibly save him. The fair is nearly over, and I

might as well go to Gibraltar; for that is the direction he has taken."

"Shall I go with you, Lope? The roads, I hear, are dangerous?"

"No, no, Mateo, there is no occasion for that; you can remain behind and take care of Frascita—you have been nearly strangers of late. I will go alone: the people on the road, robbers and all, know me: there is no danger."

"Still I might as well accompany you: I long once more to be under the shade of my old cork-trees."

"As you please, Mateo: I shall start at daylight to-morrow morning."

"How do you propose to go, Lope?" inquired the miller, in a careless tone.

"I shall ride the colonel's horse; perhaps I may be able to restore him to his proper owner."

"Why, you told me, I thought, that you had yourself bought this horse."

"So I did; but it was agreed that the colonel should have him for his next campaign, if he escaped; and if I see him he shall have the horse. I would willingly purchase the colonel's safety at many times the value of the best horse in Andalusia."

"You seem to take a great interest in this young Carlist."

"So I do: I knew his father well in former days."

They separated, each on his own business.

"He will go," thought Mateo.

"He will not go," thought Lope.

Which was right?

Shortly after this brief conversation, in which each was trying to deceive the other, a little swarthy man, well mounted, and with his escopeta slung at his saddle, passed through the Gaucin gate, and proceeded along the mountain road as fast as the rocky nature of the track admitted. He went on for five leagues without stopping. A solitary alce standing at the mouth of a gloomy pass seemed to attract his notice, for there he got off his horse and whistled. Soon a dark figure appeared from behind a rock, and stood in the path. It was the gipsy horse-dealer.

The shades of evening had fallen, but still they seemed to recognize one another even at a considerable distance. Scarcely a word passed between them; but the man unslung his escopeta, and put a letter into the gipsy's hand. The latter mounted the horse, and rode rapidly off in the direction of Gaucin: the other stood a moment or two in the path, as if watching the departing horseman, and then climbing up the rocky acclivity, was soon lost in the gloom of the evening.

Thus passed the afternoon of the second day of the fair.

The fog, which hung damply and drearily over the low country, had not reached the

sierras. But again the pale moon shed her broad light on cliff and rock, on tower and town—again the perfume of the flowers filled the night-air—again the waters sparkled—again the song of the nightingales was heard amid the groves—again all was beauty, and harmony, and repose—again the fairest flower of Ronda sat at the open window which overlooked the gardens. It was past the midnight hour, but she could not sleep, and the cool breeze refreshed her feverish cheeks. As Frascita sat there, a note fell at her feet.

News from her beloved one! Eagerly she stooped to pick it up—rapturously she kissed it: she opened it. Why does she start as if a snake had bit those dewy lips? Not his—not his were the words—but Mateo's, the detested Mateo's! Yet she read the contents aloud:—

"Once more, Frascita, will you be mine? Beware!"

It was too much.

The maiden arose from her seat, and drawing her slender form up to its full height, with flashing eyes and compressed lips, and holding the note with her arm and hand outstretched, as if it held some loathed object, with the other she tore it into a hundred pieces, and, with a gesture of indescribable majesty and scorn, she cast the fragments out of the window.

The little pieces whirled round and round in the air, glittering like snow-flakes in the moon-ray; and before they had reached the ground a half-suppressed, but deep and bitter curse was audibly muttered *beneath* her feet—then all again was still.

The gray mists of morning hung about the craggy sierra, and filled the valley with a veil of vapor, as Lope and his niece took their last farewell of their mountain home.

The broken, jagged, monstrous rocks loomed through the misty air gigantically vast and wild, presenting to the fancy the forms of domes, of minarets, of steeples, and ruined castles of mammoth times, scattered and mixed in strange confusion.

The tall figure of the smuggler, on his noble black steed, seemed magnified to a gigantic size, as he led the way along the rugged and winding track.

Frascita followed, seated in a comfortable arm-chair saddle, on a sure-footed mule.

They were alone.

The air was still. The only sounds that broke the monotony of the silence that reigned around were the clattering of the hoofs on the hollow-sounding soil, or when a night-jar rose with a feeble cry, and glided on noiseless wings through the air across their path. A lonely and a desolate scene is that wild sierra. A single sun-ray shone like molten fire on the summit of a lofty crag as they reached the gloomy pass of the solitary alce. As they entered it a huge, gaunt wal-

ture rose from a projecting rock, and stretching wide his spreading wings, floated in circles over their heads.

The alce is reached. Hark! on each side of the path there is a sound of rushing feet. From behind the rocks spring forth four men, with loud cries, "Death to the Carlist!"

One, a tall, dark man, stumbled over a stone, and fell heavily at full length; at the same moment a bullet whizzed over him. It was from the escopeta of the smuggler. But he in a moment was dragged from his horse and placed on his feet. With a sudden and powerful effort Lope broke from them. He did not attempt to stir.

At this moment the gipsy recovered his senses, and sprung on his feet to revenge himself on the Carlist.

"Seize him, men!" he shouted, "or stab him if he resists;" and he darted forward with his long knife uplifted toward the gallant smuggler. Suddenly the gipsy recoiled, and the knife dropped from his hand.

"Back, men! back, on your lives!" he wildly said; "this is no Carlist, but the Señor Lope; there is some mistake."

"O, holy Virgin! he is saved!" cried Frascita, clasping her little hands together, and lifting her eyes to heaven.

"Death to the Carlist spy!" still shouted the three rateros; "out of the way, gitano; what is all this?"

"Ay, what is all this?" said the smuggler, haughtily. "What means this violence, my friends? I am no Carlist; I am Lope de la Vega el Contrabandista."

"O do not hurt him; he is my dear, dear uncle," screamed the maiden, in agony.

The robbers hesitated.

"There is no mistake," shouted a voice: "die! dog of a Carlist, die!"

A charcoal-burner sprang from a rock with the bound of a panther; a knife gleamed in the air; and, before any one could move, or even speak, the sharp blade was buried to the hilt in the breast of the unfortunate smuggler. The three brothers stood stupefied at this sudden and awful catastrophe.

Ere they had recovered, the charcoal-burner seized Bavioca, turned him suddenly round, vaulted into the saddle, touched him with the bit, and in a moment the horse's hoofs struck fire on the flinty road, as he galloped madly away.

A shot was fired after him, but without success. For another moment the robbers gazed at the smuggler's body, as if paralyzed. Then, simultaneously, they gave a piercing cry, and, starting off at a quick run, disappeared toward Ronda.

The gipsy shook his clenched fist at the flying Manolo, and departed rapidly in the opposite direction.

Frascita threw herself on the body of her uncle; she did not speak; no tears gushed

from her eyes; she took his hand in hers; it was cold, already cold; she pushed back the hair from his forehead, and peered into his eyes; they were fixed—fixed in death's ghastly stare; she pressed her lips to his; no breath of life was there, although she thought they murmured her name. Alas! it was her own deep, sorrowful sigh.

Something like a small cloud passed between her and the sun. It was the vulture circling round his expected prey. He settled on a rock close by. Frascita started up, tossing her arms wildly in the air, and screamed aloud.

The vulture spread his wings, and again wheeled round and round, and again he settled on the rock.

Oh! it was a sight to melt a heart of stone, to see that young, fair girl, with her hands all dabbled with gore, striving to staunch the blood that still oozed from that ghastly wound, and kissing the pale, wan lips of the corpse, as if that would bring life back again; then ever and anon springing wildly up to scare the ill-omened bird away, and flinging herself down beside the bleeding body.

Oh! it was a sad, sad sight. The shadows from the alce grew shorter and shorter. The sun shone out in his meridian splendor. The solitary beetle dragged his slow length along the barren soil. The filthy vulture sat on the rock, stupid and motionless, awaiting his banquet. All was silent, solitary, and still. The living and the dead were there in one embrace. No one came. The shadows increase; the valleys are already darkening. No one comes.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Maiden is carried away—The Hut in the Moraima—The Miller and his Jackal—The Gipsy Horse-Dealer is caught; is in danger of his life; is released unexpectedly, and meets with an old friend in the nick of time—Frascita awakes from her swoon—The old Mariquita.

AND who fired the shot? and why did the gitano shake his fist at the flying charcoal-burner? Was it that he grieved for, and wished to avenge, the assassination of the smuggler? Alas for human nature, no! He left him where he fell, weltering in his blood. No, it was because he thought himself defrauded of his rightful spoil. Bavioca, his Bavioca was gone. Could he but have secured undisputed possession of the much-coveted horse, what would he have cared for the deed that was done, or for the trick that had been in part successfully played on him?

Now, as the gipsy walked rapidly away, he fancied, and not unnaturally, that he was entirely free from all participation in the death of Lope; he only saw that Mateo

had endeavored to get him out of the way for the purpose of regaining the portion of the prey which rightly belonged to him. The cunning inherent to his gipsy blood prompted him to this; nor had his revengeful disposition forgot the menacing gestures and insulting words of the terrible miller.

A gitano never forgets or forgives an injury, although he may not be able to avenge it promptly or speedily; but he will wait, and wait patiently, silently, devotedly; he will bide his time, until, like the persecuting, persevering mosquito, he has tried every inch to find an opening through which he may inflict a sting on his sleeping and unsuspecting enemy. Yet this had never entered the minds of Mateo or his jackal. Short-sighted fools! to them his part was over; he was thrown aside as a worn-out tool no longer useful; they thought no more of him—him the frustrator of all their plans.

The pointed leaves of the aloe still cast sharp and well-defined shadows upon the white soil of the mountain road, as the clattering of approaching horses echoed through the rocky defile.

At length they come. Thy watch, poor maiden, is nearly over.

Alas! she hears them not.

The horsemen are two in number, but one in crime and wickedness. One, mounted on a gallant black horse, which snorted wildly and quivered in every limb as it approached the aloe, bore on his features a look of savage joy and triumph. The other followed, leading a mule, on whose back was spread a litter covered with snow-white dimity.

See—they look cautiously around, and, dismounting, gently lift the lifeless girl from the bleeding body, and placing her inanimate form on the litter, cover it with the snowy cloth.

Then, with bloody hands, they lift the murdered man, and bearing him to the edge of the precipitous descent, deposit their burden on a projecting ledge, and push it slowly over.

The body, with a dull, dead sound, falls on the pointed rocks, and rolls over and over into the hollow beneath—disfigured, mangled, torn. The vulture is no longer scared from his feast: the corpse to the beak and claws of the obscene bird; the breathing, though helpless maiden, to the tender mercies of these two.

Which is the better fate?

Yet, like the lifting of the veil of fog from the bosom of that glowing sea, brighter scenes may dawn upon her though all is now obscurity, woe, and darkness.

And the sun twice went down and rose again, but without bringing light to the hapless Frascita.

Not very far from where the Gaucin road,

leaving the glare of the lonely mountains, enters amid the shadows of the gaunt, old cork-trees, but well concealed from sight by the dense masses of forest, there then stood a wooden building. It could scarcely be dignified with the name of a house, nor was it so mean as a hut, for it had two rooms, but something between the two.

It was not a regular venta, but an occasional rendezvous for the contrabandistas and charcoal-burners when surprised by bad weather in the solitary *Moraima*.

A low mule-shed, with a broken-down door, stood alongside the building, through which might be seen the gallant *Bavieca* quietly munching the barley in his nose bag. The surrounding scene was one of sylvan beauty. Gnarled, old, gaunt cork-trees, with dark-green foliage, and spreading fantastic branches, cast grotesque, irregular shadows on the sides of wild, broken hills which rose behind the hut, clothed with an endless variety of richly-flowering shrubs—here tufted with graceful fern; here richly clad with yellow blowing broom, or dark-eyed cistus mingled with a profusion of wild-roses.

Parallel with it ran a long, smooth, open glade of soft and pale-green turf, along which meandered a little brook, where the pink oleander, the blue-eyed iris, and the yellow lily rivaled the flowers of the hills.

Several orange-trees, laden with golden fruit, and a row of noble aloes, some still in full blossom, stood by.

Hundreds of bee-birds, bright-plumaged and busy, attracted by the honey distilled in the cups of the feathered flowers of the aloe-spike and the scented blossoms of the orange-trees, flitted round them, gleaming in the sun's rays with green and gold.

At one end of the vista, far away in the distance, rose hill above hill, blue, misty, and beautiful; the other was lost in the deep green of the forest.

Opposite to the door, where the soil was moist and black, a dark, tangled brake of lofty alders, and other trees which loved the wet, gayly festooned and entwined with wild vines and other parasitical plants, gave to the landscape a cool and refreshing appearance. Out of this tangled and densely-matted thicket, pushing the boughs cautiously aside, there suddenly came forth the form of a tall, gaunt, swarthy man.

As he did so, his quick, keen eyes seemed to take every thing in with one stealthy glance. He did not hesitate, but crossed the mossy glade with rapid steps, silent and noiseless as a red Indian, and glided like a specter into the stable.

Scarcely had he done so when two other men came from out the cottage, with mantas in their hands; and, spreading the rugs on the soft turf under the shade of the shed, they lit their cigars, and laid themselves

down at their ease. These two were Mateo and his jackal.

They were so close to the stable that the gipsy could hear every word they said; and he did not fail to listen attentively.

"The old Mariquita," said the charcoal-burner, in reply to a question from his employer, "is no fool. She is no more mad than you or I, but a cunning old hag—a witch, if you like. She says the señorita is fast recovering: she is in a sound sleep, and when she awakes her senses will come back again, and she will speak."

"The sooner the better," replied the miller; "I am already tired of waiting here: I want to hear the clack of the wheel; how the old mill will be astonished at the merry wedding we will have!"

"Pardon me for interrupting you," said Manolo; "but would it not be better to make sure first that the señorita will have you? It is easily done."

"Manolo," hissed the miller between his clenched teeth, "did I not want you. I would stab you where you sit. Fool! I love this girl."

But the cloud soon passed away, and he added, in a laughing tone,

"No, no, thou suspicious manikin, I will not defraud her of the rites of old mother-church. Once under my roof, she is mine: but we will have it all regular, and the old padre at the convent shall have his dues. To-morrow, when the sun is behind yon broom-clad hill, we will depart; so let every thing be ready: and now, Manolo, let me sleep."

In a few minutes the two lay apparently buried in the deepest slumber, for guilt and crime murder not sleep in Spain. The charcoal-burner, however, rarely suffered the power of the drowsy god to overcome his habitual watchfulness: nor did he now: still he appeared to be really asleep.

Now was the gipsy's time.

He had already slipped a bridle over the horse's head, and was in the act of lifting the cumbrous demi-piqued saddle on to the back of the unwilling Baviaca, when suddenly a rope was thrown, like a lasso, over the head and shoulders of the horse-dealer, pinioning his arms to his sides, and he was thrown violently to the ground, and the grinning countenance of the charcoal-burner appeared at the doorway.

"Ha! ha!" cried he: "there you are, gitano: so it's you, is it, like a trussed rabbit? What! you would prig the hacas while we were asleep, would you? Next time you try such a trick on, don't attempt to put a saddle on, particularly if it's a heavy one, I advise you. Hombre! you should be content with the beast himself: gipsies don't ride on saddles; the hide is good enough for them: take my word, barebacked is the

right way. Come now, what have you got to say for your noble self?"

The horse-dealer remained mute.

"Well, then, if you won't speak, get up, black face," said Manolo, still grinning, but jerking the rope, and pulling it tighter and tighter. "Come along; let's see what the Señor Mateo will say to my springed woodcock."

The gipsy showed no signs of pain, but got up silently and sulkily, and followed the charcoal-burner out of the mule-shed.

Manolo brought him where he would be face to face with his employer when he sat up, and taking two or three more turns with the cord round the gipsy's legs, fastened it; and then he awoke the miller.

"Mil demonios! what is all this? Why do you awake me? Who is he? Speak, Manolo! and don't stand grinning there," said Mateo, savagely.

The charcoal-burner briefly explained, and then withdrew a little on one side.

"Dog of a gipsy," said Mateo, sitting up and confronting the horse-dealer; "look at me: so you would steal the horse a second time; once won't do for you. Ha! were it not that I owe you something for what you have already done, I would shoot you where you stand. Who cares when a dog of a gipsy dies?"

"Oh! Señor Mateo, pardon me! pardon, I beseech you," said the gipsy in a soft, cringing, imploring tone; "I made a sad mistake; I thought the horse was mine."

"Yours!" cried the miller, staring at the unfortunate horse-dealer in utter amazement; "yours! And by what right, pray, do you claim him? Come, let us hear your plea; I will be advocate, alcalde, judge, and," added he, laughing, but with a look of ominous meaning, "executioner if need be—I have played that part before now. Know you not that I am especial district, gitano! We are in the Moraima. Come hither, Manolo, and listen to the advocate pleading his own cause."

The charcoal-burner approached to where the miller sat at his ease, smoking his cigarillo, which he had kindled during his speech, but where the gipsy stood bound, trembling and quivering in every joint, while beads of sweat appeared on his swarthy face. Had he been unbound, he could not at that moment have even attempted flight, for the miller's eye fascinated him; it not only deprived him of motion but even of the power of speech.

He remained, therefore, silent; but that silence was dangerous.

"Speak, hound, or I will stab you where you stand," cried Mateo, jumping up in a rage.

But the movement broke the spell: the gipsy uttered an imploring cry.

Another low, faint scream responded like

an echo from the hut, and at that moment an old withered crone came to the door, and beckoned to Mateo with her finger.

Mateo started in his turn, and, exchanging a rapid glance with the charcoal-burner, turned into the building.

The gipsy cast a beseeching glance at Manolo, but said nothing.

"He is not worth killing," muttered that worthy, as he drew forth his long, keen navaja, and gazed at its bright, sharp point with an affectionate expression.

Whether the remembrance of the olla and the Malaga so liberally bestowed on him by the gipsy at the fair influenced his feelings, or whether he really did not think him worth a stab of the knife, we know not, for who can explain the motives of such a being? But with a sharp stroke he severed the cords that encircled the miserable gitano, and continuing the movement of his hand, waved it in the air and pointed to the forest and the hut. Without stopping to thank his deliverer, the gipsy took the hint, darted off at full speed like a startled roe, and plunged at once into the tangled brush-wood.

The charcoal-burner thought no more of him than he would of a thieving cur-dog released from hanging: he little knew a gipsy's real propensities. He was gone, and that was enough for him.

But he did not go very far.

And did the gipsy feel grateful for the preservation of his life? Not he: he never thought about it at all; but still his heart was fixed on Bavieca.

As the horse-dealer, hardly knowing whither he went, struck into one of those narrow, sandy horse-paths that wind through the dark *Moraima*, he heard the jingling of bells, and a voice that he knew singing snatches of songs and whistling aloud merrily, making the old wood ring again; and as he turned a sudden angle of the road he encountered, face to face, our old friend the jovial little muleteer.

"Well met, friend horse-dealer," shouted Pepito, joyously, springing from his horse and embracing the gipsy.

"News! news! Here, take a pull at the *bota*, it's the right sort, real Xerez, and tell us how is the Señor Lope and the señora his niece, and my adorable mistress."

"The Señor Lope is dead," replied the gitano; "and the señora not much better!"

"Dead! the Señor Lope dead!" faltered out the muleteer. "It is impossible: come, gitano, you are joking with me—say so, come."

"You Christians are hard to convince, and you will never believe one of us; but it is as I tell you."

"Dead! the Señor Lope dead!" again repeated Pepe, wildly. "I tell you, gitano, that is impossible;" and he flew at him,

caught him by the throat, and shook him violently. "Dog, you are deceiving me!"

"By all the gods you worship, it is true," stammered the horse-dealer between the pauses of the shaking. Pepe soon saw that the gipsy was not joking, and released his hold. Then, while the gipsy related his story, only concealing the part he himself had played, the poor little faithful muleteer stood there with tears in his eyes, crushing his broad-leaved hat between his compressed hands, and still he went on muttering, "Dead! the Señor Lope dead!—impossible, impossible!"

But when the gipsy told how he had not long before left the miller in undisturbed possession of the person of the unhappy Frascita, and the conversation he had overheard, indignation took the place of grief, and he called the miller a thousand opprobrious names, tearing his hair with very rage: but this fit, too, soon passed away; for Pepe, although excitable, was a shrewd little fellow, and prompt to action.

Dragging the horse-dealer under an old ilex, he made him sit down, produced some food from his alforjas, and unslung the *bota*.

The gipsy was hungry and thirsty, so he ate ravenously and drank copiously; but poor little Pepe could only drink.

The wine was good and strong, and soon took effect on his mercurial temperament: and he proposed right valiantly to the gipsy that they should go at once and try to rescue the imprisoned señorita.

But this was not the gitano's plan of operation: he had no idea of risking his life to save a girl of the hated race, although under ordinary circumstances he might have done so for a horse; but to attack the formidable miller was entirely out of the question. Pepito called him a coward, and urged him with promises of reward and threats of vengeance, but it was of no avail. The gipsy had too lately escaped from the miller's clutches to venture within their reach again, except at his own time, in his own stealthy manner, and for his own purposes: he, however, promised faithfully to keep a watch on Mateo's movements, and to communicate with Frascita if possible, and assure her of the safety of our hero.

Pepito wisely thought that this would encourage her in her present situation, and he was right. They settled on a spot near which the miller must pass on his way to the mill, and there they agreed to meet early on the following morning, if nothing happened in the interval. Pepe gave the horse-dealer his *escopeta*, all the dollars he had in his sash, the rest of the food, and the *bota*, in which still remained a small portion of the generous wine; and promising him a large reward if they succeeded in rescuing the smuggler's niece, climbed again into his saddle.

And they each departed by the way that they had come.

But the muleteer neither sang nor whistled as usual; his heart was too full of grief and indignation.

"Blood! there will be more blood!" muttered the gipsy to himself. The Buane shall die and the Cali shall have his horse again. Hufrah!"

The scream that issued from the hut was, indeed, from the lips of the forlorn maiden.

She had awoke as if from a fearful dream, perhaps to a worse reality.

As her senses were gradually restored to her, she became conscious that she was in a house, and not on the wild sierra: she could see through the latticed casement the waving of the branches, and she would hear the twittering of the birds. For one moment she fancied that it was all a dream, and that she was again amid the gardens of her own loved mountain home. But the cry of the gitano brought back to her recollection the whole scene on the mountain instantaneously, as a flash of vivid lightning shows some awful danger concealed by the darkness and gloom of the murky night.

She screamed aloud, and fainted away again.

When a second time Frascita recovered her senses, she found a withered old woman, whose face was like shriveled parchment, but gayly adorned with orange-flowers in her thin, gray locks, and a handsome lace mantilla over her skinny shoulders, busily chafing her temples, and singing broken snatches of songs with a harsh, croaking voice.

Frascita was about to speak, but she was prevented; for the old crone, pressing her bony hand on the maiden's lips, like withered twigs on a moss-rose, immediately broke out into a kind of doggerel rhyme—

"Hush! hush! my sweet bird,
Not a word! not a word!
For if you should speak,
'Twill keep you quite weak;
I'll sing you to sleep
With songs that shall creep
Low and soft on the ear;
So, sleep, my sweet maiden, without any fear."

"Ay de mi, madre mia! Where am I? Who are you?" exclaimed Frascita, shuddering at the strange old woman, who, without noticing the interruption, continued her rhymes—

"The birds in the sky
Sing cheerily, cheerily;
But sweeter am I,
Caroling merrily.
Then rest, maiden, rest,
Your roses to keep;
Come, lie on my breast,
And I'll sing you to sleep.
Young maids, when they marry, should never go weep."

"What mean you, mother? Where am I? Who brought me here? Oh, tell me,

for the love of the blessed Virgin," said the bewildered Frascita, as she endeavored to rise from the bed.

"Lie still, my honey-bird; lie still, my rose of the sierras. You are safe enough, my darling! He will protect you," answered the hag. Then she continued, in the same strain as before—

"The fox of the mountains
Hath met with his fate,
The deer of the forest
Hath found a sweet mate;
The birds in their flight
Shine like gold in the sky,
But none are so bright
As the maiden's soft eye.

Then rest thee, my daughter, without any fear,
The day is at hand, and the bridegroom is near."

"Oh, this is too terrible," murmured Frascita, hiding her face in the bed-clothes: and still the beldame went on—

"The birds they are singing
In frolicsome mood,
The bells they are ringing
In th' evergreen wood;
She's fair as the day,
He's strong and he's tall,
And none say him nay,
For he masters them all.
Then blush not, fair maiden, but rest by my side;
To-day thou art single, to-morrow a bride."

When Frascita again dared to raise her drooping head and look up, the hag was gone, and instead, there stood by her bedside the terrible miller.

Mateo gazed tenderly, nay, even affectionately, on the maiden's pallid countenance; for, now that he had reached the coveted Moraima, he thought that she was his—all his.

He therefore addressed her in a kind, conciliatory manner, deploring, with many expressions of regret, the unfortunate mistake that had been made in the murder of her uncle for a Carlist chief, and explained why she had been brought to the hut, saying, that as she was too ill to bear the journey to Gibraltar, and as it was expected every hour that Gaucin would be attacked by the Facciosos, and knowing old Mariquita, strange as she was, to be a capital nurse, he thought that the quiet of this retired spot would be more likely to restore her to consciousness, and assist in her recovery better than any more noisy, frequented place. He made many tender inquiries after her health, but did not urge his suit, and said nothing about the young Carlist.

All this was plausible and specious enough, but it did not completely deceive the maiden. Frascita listened attentively to what Mateo said. She had no suspicion of his having had any participation in the death of her uncle. Terrible and hateful as she deemed the miller, this had never entered her imagination; but that he would take advantage of

her unprotected situation, was not for one moment to be doubted. He continued, however, to talk kindly to her about her friends at Gibraltar, saying that he would take her there as soon as it was practicable—perhaps in a day or two; but that at that moment the roads were impassable on account of the Carlists who were at San Roque.

Frasquita, amid all her grief, her doubts, and fears, longed to ask him what had become of Juan; but she dared not, for she feared to arouse and revive that jealousy which now seemed extinct.

Mateo himself believed that the young Carlist, had been captured in the Felicidad, for so it was reported in the country, the people on the coast having seen her cut off from Gibraltar by the armed *felucca*. It was he, moreover, who had apprised the authorities at Gaucin of the flight of Colonel Juan toward the coast, by the note sent on with the horse-dealer; and they had, in their turn, warned the *carabineros* at the Guadiara by messengers to be on the alert, and to seize any suspicious individuals. But the real object of this note was to get the gipsy out of the way, lest (as he did) he should recognize Lope, and interfere with their plan of separating Frasquita from her uncle by that simple Spanish method, the knife!

So far the miller had been completely successful, in spite of the return of the gitanos, who, ignorant of the contents of the note, hastened back to secure Bavioca; and every thing augured well for the future, if he could only succeed in lulling suspicion in the maiden's breast for a day. He therefore, as we have seen, assumed a kind and conciliatory manner, the more natural as he really in some degree loved Frasquita, and violence did not seem necessary to secure his object.

How he was foiled in this will presently appear. Mateo went out, and Frasquita was left alone. As she communed with her own mind, and began to reflect, she quickly perceived the utter helplessness of her situation. Alone, in the solitary Moraima, without a friend, what had she to protect or cheer her but her own maiden courage and her love for Juan—and what was this against the ferocious disposition of Mateo and his gang? She could not understand why she had been brought to this lonely place, if not for some particular purpose? And what was that purpose? She reflected, and shuddered. The shallow cunning of Mateo had not duped her; on the contrary, she saw through his kindness an ominous future. Now she began to see the meaning of the songs sung by the strange old woman; these, at first, had only terrified her by their strangeness; now the reality—the horrible reality—burst suddenly upon her understanding. She—she who loved with all her soul a bright and noble being, must wed this fearful, this hateful man! Could she do

so? No, no! she would sooner die—a thousand times die.

Presently she heard the noise of horses led out of a stable, and she could see two men girthing their saddles in front of the hut. One, she knew, was the miller, by his dress, and tall athletic figure. Who was the other? Suddenly a cold, shuddering horror crept, with an icy chill, over the maiden's tender frame, and her limbs shook as if palsied.

It was he—her uncle's murderer!

Ay! even in that one awful moment when the dying smuggler fell to the ground, every feature of his slayer was impressed upon her mind as if burned in with fire. She would have known that face any where, at any time, could she have lived for centuries.

Hark! they ride away.

A fearful vision is removed from her sight; but it has left a terrible impression behind. Every thing that had occurred passed in rapid succession before her.

The startling, the awful reality—the certainty of her wretched fate—depending, as it now did, on Mateo's will, was fully revealed to her.

It was he, then, who had contrived, if not executed, her uncle's death, by means of the charcoal-burner. It was evident now that the story of the Carlist chief was only a pretense to blind her, and render Mateo less odious; his kindness, therefore, was all assumed. What could she do to avoid her fate? Should she fly, now that they were gone? Alas! she could scarcely stand; and even if she was able to move, whither could she direct her steps?—it was altogether hopeless. Should she try and make a friend of the old Mariquita? It was a forlorn chance; but hope catches at straws.

She arose and called Mariquita, and lay down again, for she felt herself weak.

The old woman came in, singing as before.

"What does my bright lily want? Shall the old woman sing you to sleep?"

"No, mother; I want to talk to you."

Mariquita sat down on a low stool by the side of the bed, which had no curtains, yet nearly filled the little room, and from which Frasquita could see into the wood through the open casement.

The maiden no longer shuddered at the presence of the strange old hag; for, in such a situation, to have by her one of her own sex, even such as Mariquita, was a relief.

"Madre mia," said Frasquita, in a low, soft, sweet voice, "did you ever love?"

"The bird flies, the deer runs, the fish swims, the Andalusian maiden loves," replied the hag:

"The fish to the sea,
The bird to the grove
The herd to the lea,
The maid to her love

Ha, ha, ha ! Did old Mariquita, the withered, the shriveled, the despised, the spit upon, ever love ?

"Oh, he was young and fair !
Oh, he was good and true !
All golden was his hair,
His eye was soft and blue.
He spoke not with our tongue,
His voice was in his eye ;
They told me it was wrong—
I answered with a sigh.

"Ah, maiden !" exclaimed the hag, sighing deeply, as if the recollection of those days of love had suddenly awakened in her mind all her previous history, "it was war time ; our village was full of soldiers ; but they were not of our race—they spoke with a strange tongue ; they worshiped not at our altars. There was one among them, beautiful, tall, and fair ; rosy as the streaks of the evening sky, and his hair shone like threads of gold.

"He gazed upon my charms
And heaved a burning sigh—
He clasped me in his arms—
Alas, I could not fly,
Alas, I could not fly,
I loved him all too well ;
I gave him sigh for sigh—
He triumphed—and I fell.

"Wo ! wo ! They discovered our secret meetings, but they knew not all that had passed between us. We were separated, and I was forced to wed one I detested. Maiden ! you know not what it is to pass the dreary, wakeful night, by the side of one loathed—as I loathed him they had wedded me to—while the beating heart throbs for the embraces of the loved one. A child was born to me—a child of love ! His eyes were blue as the vault of heaven ; his skin as fair as the snows of the sierras ; his cheeks rosy as the pomegranate blossom ; and his hair became in color like the golden lily. My husband tore the sweet babe from my embrace, reviled, spat upon me, and turned me out into the wide, wide world. The Beauty of the Village became an outcast and a wanderer."

"Alas, alas ! poor woman !" said the kind-hearted maiden, "yours is a sad, sad story."

"Listen !" cried the hag, starting up, and tossing her arms wildly about :

"Hark, thundering cannons roar !
"Hark, pealing volleys rattle !
Hiet, silence reigns once more !
Hiet, distant flies the battle !
Where o'er the blood-stained plain
The hungry vultures hover,
Amid the mangled slain
A woman seeks her lover.

"Ay, shudder, maiden, and close your eyes, for 'tis a fearful scene ; but the delicate beauty sought every where, over mountain and over plain, through village and through town, amid the fierce, wild soldiery, exposed to want, to misery, to insult, until she found him a prey to the vultures ?

"There's blood upon his cheek,
There's foam upon his lip,
That lip that mine did seek,
Its honeyed sweet to sip ;
All fixed his soft blue eye,
So ghastly and so dim,
But oh ! I could not die,
But live to weep for him.

"Yes, maiden, yes : he fell like a hero, fighting for our liberty—for me, for all of us ; there, on that blood-stained field, my beautiful, my loved one died, and I became what I am—a miserable, degraded, mad old woman !" and Mariquita buried her face in her hands, as if overcome by the tale she had just told ; but those skinny fingers, instead of a starting tear, concealed from the eyes of the deeply-sympathizing Frascita a withering, demoniacal sneer.

CHAPTER IX.

In which the Story returns to our Hero—His trusty little Guide leaves him—Gomez appears at San Roque—Our Hero rejoins his Party—The Arriero and the Charcoal-Burner—They fight ; Pepito wins ; but success is dangerous—A Friend in need.

THE miller is at his mill, making preparations for the coming day—the maiden is asleep, dreaming of her lover—the gipsy is prowling about, waiting for Baviaca—but where is our hero all this time ? Juan, we begin to feel that we have been treating you with great neglect ; but the fact is, you were doing nothing but fretting yourself, and wasting your time and patience for two whole days.

During that awful time, when his mistress was lying senseless and inanimate on the bleeding body of her dearly-loved uncle, amid the uncouth rocks of the lonely sierra, with the vulture and the beetle sole spectators of her miserable plight, Juan was lazily, if not comfortably, smoking his cigar on the little deck of the Felicidad, as she lay snugly moored amid her fellow-smugglers, waiting for an opportunity to rejoin his party. His thoughts were now nearly equally balanced between his lovely mistress and the success of his faction. Before he had seen Frascita his whole soul and all the energies of his vigorous mind had been bent on one sole object—the cause of the beloved Carlos Quinto el Rey—but now the case was much altered ; new features arose that he had not before seen. Gradually, as he reflected, the veil was lifted from before his eyes, and he saw in this struggle all the horrors, all the miseries of a civil war. Even putting on one side as nothing the miller's jealous and formidable rivalry, how could he even ever hope to see his mistress again without wading through a sea of blood, perhaps shed by those she cared for ?

Now he began to shudder at the cruel atrocities committed by both sides, and the

certainly of the wretched fate awaiting all who should by ill luck fall into the hands of the party opposed to them. No mercy—no quarter! Death, sudden and violent, rapine, fear, and outrage, went hand in hand in this unnatural contest. Love had at length shown him the picture, in its true colors, which loyalty and ambition had heretofore covered with a flimsy curtain. Yet his honor was pledged; he must rejoin Gomez at any risk, at any sacrifice.

Our hero resolved, however, to endeavor, as far as his limited power allowed him, to mitigate the horrors of the strife; and if he could not succeed in that—if they still persisted in this war to the knife—that he would withdraw from the struggle on the first opportunity when he could do so with honor, and quit forever his beloved but unhappy country.

Pepe, having seen our hero safe for the present, and having procured a pass, through the agency of Lope's friends, of whose violent death no report had as yet reached Gibraltar, had landed on the Rock, and strove, although vainly, to procure a horse to take him back to Ronda. They would not lend him one, for they were afraid of the Facciosos, and, moreover, the Queen's troops at the lines seized every horse that could carry a man.

The little arriero, however, impatient himself to rejoin Lope, and urged by Juan, who wished him to return and assure his mistress of his safety, set out on foot on the evening of the second day for San Roque.

There he found what he wanted—a good horse, some food, an escopeta, and a bota of Xerez; for he was well known there, and Lope had many friends in that part of the country, and they knew not of his unhappy death.

Fortunately, it was late in the evening when Pepe reached San Roque, and this made him postpone his departure until the following morning; and he was jogging merrily along through the lonely Moraima when, as has been narrated, he met the scared gitano.

The merry little muleteer cared for neither Christinos nor Carlists; they were all the same to him: but on the sands and on the San Roque road he met many fugitives—soldiers and carabineros—men, women, and children, horses, mules, and asses, all laden with household furniture, flocking toward Gibraltar, and all who were able were crying out "The Carlists are coming—the Carlists are coming."

Pepe threaded his way through the crowd quite unheeded; they were all too frightened to take any notice of him.

Lucky little dog! he passed through the disordered Christinos unquestioned and uninjured, and quitted San Roque just as the opposite party was entering, and, more op-

portunately still, encountered the horse-dealer exactly in the nick of time.

So the Fates willed it.

But we are again leaving our hero—it is really too bad.

On the morning of the third day a singular but not unwelcome spectacle presented itself before the eyes of the young Carlist, who still remained on board the smuggling craft.

I can fancy the shade of some grave, old Roman sitting on a rock below Cartea, where once, perhaps, his galley lay snugly moored, surveying, with astonishment, the incongruous warfare around him.

"Motley is your only wear," says the fool; and surely there was enough of it here.

Scared women and children—irregular regulars—militia-men in an awful quandary—heaps of household furniture—horses and cattle—mules, donkeys, pigs, goats, and even fowls, all huddled higgledy-piggledy together, sheltering under the flag that waves over the grim old rock, or flying before a wild-looking, armed rabble—themselves pursued—speaking the same language, and evidently of the same breed.

Splendid-looking soldiers in scarlet uniform, with heads erect, and measured tread, keeping them apart with especial politeness. "No fighting here, if you please, gentlemen." Other men equally splendid-looking, but in blue jackets, not quite so politely requesting one party to walk off, with special messengers in the shape of cannon-balls giving the unfortunate Carlists a bellyful of iron, while their general was giving the English officers a bellyful of pork-chops and vino seco.

Joking apart, the whole of this business appeared to be an anomaly, a puzzle to the uninitiated—a war and not a war.

It is a fact well known to many, that several of the officers of the garrison of Gibraltar lunched with Gomez at San Roque at the very time when the "Jaseur" was firing round-shot at the unfortunate Carlists as they were marching round the head of the bay, near the mouth of the Guadarranque, killing one miserable aide-de-camp mounted on a white horse, and a few others, I believe, of less note.

Juan soon learned the reason of the appearance of the disordered and flying Christinos.

Gomez had occupied San Roque in force; his whole army was there, or on the road. There could be now no difficulty in joining him. Juan's heart beat high at the prospect, and for one moment he forgot Frascas and his love, and he urged the captain of the Fekidad to land him immediately. But the crafty Genoese pointed out the danger they would run by day from the boats of the vessels of war, both English and Spanish.

that were lying in the bay, and bade him wait until nightfall. That was a long, dreary, thoughtful day to our hero, but, like all others, it had an end; and then, before the moon had risen, with muffled oars a small, sharp boat cut silently and rapidly the blue waters of the bay until it ran, with a gentle, grating sound, high upon the shelving sand beneath the cliffs of old Carteia.

Juan jumped nimbly out, and alone, without a guide, succeeded in finding the San Roque road, and unchallenged entered the town.

Making himself known to some of the Carlist soldiers (for he was still disguised in his Majo dress), he inquired for the general, and in a few minutes he found himself once more in comparative safety, and heartily welcomed by that singular being; and from him Juan learned the true position of affairs.

Gomez, after overrunning the greater part of Andalusia, and having occupied Cordova for nearly a week, was now driven fairly into a corner, and apparently hemmed in by three separate parties of the Queen's forces, without a chance of escape.

But he did not despair.

The attempt to raise the country had failed. Ribero, Alaix, and he who, at one time an exile at Gibraltar, has since played such a conspicuous part in the annals of Spain, the fierce Narvaez, followed close on his footsteps, while detachments of the Christinos were flying before him.

They ought to have crushed him, but they did not—they ought to have driven his army into the sea, but they could not; for Gomez, by his rapid movements, baffled and foiled them all. Yet what the Christino leaders were doing for the three days that Gomez was at San Roque "I can not tell."

Juan, in his turn, was relating his adventures at Ronda, and his wonderful escape in the Felicidad, when they were suddenly disturbed by a tremendous uproar.

Gomez occupied the principal posada of San Roque. The inhabitants of this little town showed but little antipathy to the Carlists, and they, in return, abstained mostly from plundering; and such, strange to say, was the case nearly over the whole of Andalusia.

The uproar beneath the windows of the inn continued, and it became evident that there was some unusual commotion. The cause of this must now be told.

The night had fallen, when Pepe, with his heart still full of burning grief and bitter indignation, returned the jaded hack to his owner, who lived in the outskirts of the town. The muleteer strolled quite unconcernedly through the streets, amid the wild-looking, fierce Biscayan soldiery.

His arriero's dress did not attract notice; and, anxious to ascertain whether Colonel

Juan had yet contrived to join his party, he entered a venta which stood by the principal posada of the town, where several Carlist soldiers were smoking and drinking.

Amid a group of redcaps there stood a man in the dress of a charcoal-burner; but his back was turned toward the door, and Pepe could not see his face.

The arriero seated himself at a small table, and called for some wine; and he was in the act of raising the first glass to his lips when he heard a voice that he thought he knew. His hand remained upraised, with the glass to his lips; but he did not drink.

Again that voice spoke.

Suddenly the muleteer's eyeballs glared like a wild cat's, and he gnashed his teeth together—you might have heard them rasp—as with a fierce cry he sprang from his seat, upsetting the little table, bottle, glasses, and all; and with one bound he was alongside the charcoal-burner, and laying his hand on his shoulder, twirled him round with a quick, violent movement, and they were face to face. Pepe shook his fist in the charcoal-burner's face; but, choked with passion, he could not speak—the gleam of his eyes showed what he meant.

Manolo—for it was that worthy—had evidently been drinking, and was without his hat, and he started back at first at the startling and sudden appearance of the muleteer. But quickly recovering himself, he drew forth his long knife and rushed at Pepe; but his arm was seized by the soldiers, and he was held back, struggling violently, and cursing horribly.

"Let us have it all fair. A ring! a ring!" cried they.

"Not in here, not in here!" called out the alarmed host; "not in here, gentlemen, if you please: go out in the street."

"In the street, in the street!—the moon is up, and there is light enough," cried the soldiers, as they dragged the struggling charcoal-burner into the open air.

They had heard nothing of the cause of this deadly quarrel; but some backed the muleteer, others the charcoal-burner. The waning moon shed a faint, dubious light down the open street upon this strange scene; but the atmosphere, so pure and serene, interrupted not her rays until they fell on the forms of the wild and now excited soldiers.

Pepe, drawing his knife, followed the charcoal-burner into the street.

They were apparently well matched; each about the same size and stature, and each armed with a long, sharp-pointed knife. But Pepe, though mad with rage, and struck dumb with intense horror at the sight of his dear master's murderer, had not been drinking; and, moreover, he had his hat—and much to avenge.

The lower orders of Spaniards practice

from their infancy the use of the deadly *navaja*; it is their inseparable companion, and they can use it with a dexterity almost incredible. I have often seen in the towns and villages of Andalusia little boys playing at knives with pieces of wood, and showing great skill and readiness in handling their mimic weapons. The Englishman has his fist, the Irishman his shillelah, the Negro his head, and the Spaniard his knife, which he uses as promptly and readily as the others; but the effect as may be supposed, is widely different.

"Now then, my gamecocks, at it!—a dollar on the first stroke!" shouted one of the *arriero's* backers.

"A dollar on black face!" cried another, patting the charcoal-burner on his back.

Pepe and Manolo glared fiercely at one another, as each now stood prepared to spring, crouching as a panther does before his leap—their knives firmly grasped in their right hands, with the thumb on the blade, and held about level with the knee.

The soldiers formed a ring round them, and stood in silence, for now it was not fair to speak.

"Toma!" shouted the charcoal-burner, as, with a rapid movement, he jumped at the *arriero* with a deadly intention, but uncertain feet.

As Manolo was in the air, Pepe, with his left hand, dashed his broad-leaved hat into his face, and baffled his aim.

The impetus of the spring, aided by the *aguardiente* he had drank, carried the charcoal-burner staggering forward; and as he passed, the muleteer, jumping quickly on one side, drove his long knife up to the haft in the side of him who had slain his best friend, and, with a shout of triumph, he cried, "Take that for Lope!"

It was all over in a minute.

The wounded charcoal-burner fell forward on his face, with the red blood spurting from the gash in his side.

The soldiers, accustomed as they were to scenes of blood, were shocked at the suddenness of the catastrophe, although they might have expected it; and promptly, but gently and with ease, raised the dying charcoal-burner, and strove to stanch the blood; but in vain: life was fast fleeing away.

"Water, bring me water," gasped Manolo; "I have—something—to tell—I am faint—I burn—water—water."

The soldiers promptly procured some, and poured it down his throat and over his face.

This revived the charcoal-burner for a moment, and he murmured out:—"That man—is—a spy—a Christino—a spy;" and, raising himself on one hand, he pointed with the other at the *arriero*, who stood silently by, regarding his dying enemy.

This was the last effort of nature; for, with a look of deadly hate in his fast-closing eyes, and a curse on his lips, the ruffian breathed his last, and Lope was avenged.

No sooner did Pepe perceive that it was all over with his foe, than all his ferocity vanished in an instant, and the object for which he had returned to San Roque again became uppermost in his mind. He thought not of escaping, but of continuing his search for Colonel Juan. He had avenged the uncle; he must now save the niece. He picked up his hat, and was about to depart; but the attention of the savage and capricious soldiers was now, by the dying man's words, unpleasantly directed to the victorious little muleteer.

"A Christino spy! A Christino spy! A fair game! A fair game!" shouted they, crowding round him on all sides in every direction.

One knocked his hat off—another tried to trip him up—a third struck him across the face with his bayonet—and he stood every chance of being torn to pieces on the spot.

Amid the shouts, execrations, and blows which literally poured upon him, he heard the voice of a sergeant asking the soldiers what all the row was about, and who they had got there.

"Only a little Christino dog prowling about to see what is going on: he has just killed a man who told us all about him," was answered by one of the soldiers.

"Put him in the guard-room," said the sergeant, "and we will see what he is made of to-morrow."

"No, no!" cried the soldiers all together; "he is ours: we will see what he is like now—no to-morrow—there is no time like the present."

"Listen to me for the love of God!" screamed the half-bewildered, half-enraged *arriero*, catching at the sergeant's arm: "I'm no spy: I'm Pepe the *arriero*: it's a matter of life and death."

"Arriero or no *arriero*, it's likely to be that soon enough," said the sergeant, turning away and shrugging his shoulders.

Pepe tried to break through them, but the crowd was impenetrable. Like a fox mobbed in cover, he was headed at every point and bandied from one to another of the ruffianly soldiery, who, like the hounds, were eager for blood, now they had once smelled it.

Pepe glared fiercely at them, and brandished aloft his bloody knife.

But they only laughed at him.

"Only listen to me," cried the muleteer again, at the top of his voice; "only listen to what I have to say, or take a message to Colonel Juan, or take me to General Gomez; I don't care what you do with my carcass afterward."

But this had no effect; they only laughed at him the more.

"A pretty joke, truly," said one; "take such a thing as that to General Gomez!"

"No, no, my little friend: he doesn't deal with such petty articles; he leaves them to us poor fellows," said another.

"Come now," cried a third, shout Viva Carlos Quinto el Rey! Down with the usurper! Down with the Liberals!"

"Any thing—every thing you please," replied the arriero, clasping his hands together; "only let me speak to the colonel, if it's only for a moment."

"The fox fears for his skin," said one, even more savage, if possible, than the rest. "What say you, my boys, shall we see how he looks without any?"

Poor Pepito's fate hung upon a thread.

At that moment a window in the posada was thrown up, a head protruded, and a harsh, commanding voice cried out, "Silence, beasts! What is all this noise about?"

"It is only a spy of the Liberals, your excellency, that the soldiers have caught," replied the sergeant, touching his cap.

"Is that all?" said the general, in the act of turning away.

Pepe, with a sudden effort, broke from the soldiers' grasp, and, running under the window, which was not more than six feet from the ground, cried out, "I'm no spy! I'm Pepe the arriero, come with a message to Colonel Juan—a message from his mistress, of life and death."

Gomez, fortunately for our hero, as well as for our little friend, heard his words, and turned round into the room, saying, "This is something that concerns you, colonel. Who is your little friend?"

"Ha! ha!" shouted a voice in the crowd. "The little chap is no spy after all; only a pimp: ask him the color of her stockings!"

"Leave him alone, men," said the sergeant; "his skin is safe for this bout; better luck next time."

Juan arose from his seat and went to the window; but, although the moonlight fell on the form of the arriero, he could scarcely recognize in the blood-stained, battered, and dust-covered figure, who stood there without his hat, and with his long hair streaming wildly over his face, his faithful little friend and guide, the jaunty, spruce, merry muleteer. Pepe, however, uttered a scream of joy; but, recovering himself quickly, he made Juan a low bow, and said, in a voice only loud enough for him to hear, "O, señor! Your excellency must come immediately; the señorita—"

Juan did not wait to hear another word; but, springing from the window, to the utter astonishment of the soldiers, who fell back on every side, he caught Pepito up in his

arms as if he had been a child, and rushed with him into the posada.

The soldiers dispersed, and the body of the charcoal-burner was thrown on a muck-heap—fitting grave for such a monster.

His appearance at San Roque may be accounted for in a few words.

Frascita, as may be remembered, had regained her senses before Mateo quitted the hut on the black horse, and accompanied by Manolo. He had gone to his mill to get the house ready, and to warn the old padre at the convent of the approaching wedding, which he intended should take place immediately. On his way, it occurred to him that Frascita would, perhaps, recognize her uncle's murderer; and that he did not wish should be the case until after they were married, and then he did not care. He therefore sent Manolo away to San Roque, with his sash heavy with dollars (for Mateo was liberal enough to those who served him), to pick up what news he could, and ascertain the reality of the capture of the Felicidad, and the consequent death of his hated rival, the young Carlist.

Manolo readily complied, for he was partial to aguardiente, and tired of the stupid life in the Moraima.

But in so doing the miller lost his right hand, and the charcoal-burner his life.

It would be but repeating what my readers already know, if I were to relate the conversation that passed between Juan and the arriero.

The gipsy's tale, the death of Lope, his own intended murder, the wretched situation of his mistress, half dead, and in the power of the miller; Pepe's encounter with the murdering charcoal-burner, and the narrow escape the poor little fellow himself had from being torn to pieces—all these filled the young Carlist's mind with an indescribable feeling of horror and dismay, mingled with a burning, torturing thirst for revenge.

He attributed all these dreadful scenes to the unnatural warfare now raging in the country, creating a thirst for blood, and rendering such deeds familiar to the minds of men, and by its consequent anarchy leaving them unpunished, except by as fearful a retaliation.

That retaliation had already commenced; it must be persevered in, or how could his darling mistress be rescued?

The miller must die.

Pepe, well taken care of, soon recovered the equanimity of his disposition. He had lost nothing but his hat, and that was easily replaced; the cut on his face he had promised himself to repay on the first opportunity. He had had revenge, and he was satisfied; at least, it quieted his mind.

He advised our hero, as it was now very late, to wait until the morning dawned, and

then to join the gipsy at the appointed time and place.

Juan reluctantly assented; for, although impatient to set out to rescue his dear mistress, he felt that he could not but trust his faithful, devoted little guide, who had already brought him so well through so many dangers and difficulties.

But Juan slept little that night.

Early on the following morning, a small party of cavalry, dressed in blue jackets and red caps, and tolerably well armed and mounted, might have been seen slowly wending their way in single file along the steep, narrow, stony road which leads from the little town of San Roque into the wild Moraima, and at their head rode Juan and the arriero.

CHAPTER X.

The old Crone and the disconsolate Maiden—The Gipsy again!—The Knife—The Wish gratified.

MARIQUITA was, in truth, of gipsy origin, and her tale was altogether false; but she sought to gain pity and gold from the maiden by her woful story. Mateo, moreover, had instructed her carefully in the part she was to play. She was to keep watch over the maiden, and to hint cleverly what was to come, and to prepare Frascita for it by informing her gently of the death of the young Carlist, which he thought might, perhaps, reconcile her to her fate. He dared not trust himself to do it, for fear he should, too soon for his purposes, arouse suspicion in the maiden's breast.

Frascita did, in truth, feel deeply interested in the old woman's story, for there were many points in it that closely resembled her own fate; and no wonder, for Mariquita had cunningly devised her tale so as to draw the maiden on to ask more questions.

"Ay de mi; what a sad fate was yours, poor woman," said Frascita, with tears in her eyes; "but mine, too, is sad. Pity me, dear mother, pity me; for I, too, love!—and, alas! alas! I fear I shall never, never see him again."

"And do you not love the bold miller?" cried the hag, as if in amazement.

"Ah, no, no, mother; the man I love is gentle, and good, and noble."

"Ay, but where is he? Why does he not come?"

"Alas, mother! I know not; would to God I did! They seek his life to slay him, for they say he is a traitor to his country, a rebel to his queen; but to me he is the breath of life. Oh, Mother of Heaven! why are there any Carlists? Why do they kill each other?"

"Hush!" cried the old woman, as if relapsing into her half-mad mood:

"The glowing seas are deep
That wash the Eastern shore,
And mangled bodies sleep
Where they shall wake no more;
The boat is swift and fast
That skims those smooth seas over
The boat is taken at last
That bears the maiden's lover."

"Oh! they have taken him," cried Frascita, clasping her hands together in agony, as the picture drawn by the hag was realized in her mind, "and they will murder him."

"Hush! interrupt me not," said the beldame imperiously:

"The volley rattles loud,
The deadly bullets come,
The white sand for a shroud,
The billow for a tomb;
A cry upon the air,
A splashing on the wave,
Oh, tell me why is there
A corpse, and not a grave?
The wave rolls back again,
A rebel corpse to cover,
The maiden seeks in vain
The body of her lover."

As Frascita, excited and horrified at the beldame's rhymes, rose up on the bed to entreat her to be more explicit, and tell her the whole truth, she saw through the casement the form of a tall, gaunt, swarthy man looking into the room, with a half-suspicious, half-satisfied air: his finger on his lips enjoined silence.

Frascita, with admirable presence of mind, suppressed the exclamation she was about to utter; but she could not prevent her eyes from remaining fixed on the countenance of the man who stood there.

"What see you there, my *alce-flower*?" said the old hag, her suspicions aroused by the maiden's involuntary start, and the expression of her countenance.

"Oh, mother!" said the maiden, wildly. "I thought I saw *him*—but oh, it must have been fancy only."

"Whom mean you?" replied the beldame, with an ill-disguised sneer: "was a your lover?"

"Ay de mi!" murmured the maiden: "mother! you have been playing with me: and he is alive, or how could he be here!"

Frascita's manner was so natural, that it completely deceived Mariquita.

"Ha! is it so?" muttered the crone, shaking her head, but with her teeth chattering in spite of herself, for she really believed Juan to be dead: "it must be his ghost, or perhaps the girl's senses are wandering again; let us see, let us see;" and she hobbled out of the room.

Before she could get to the door, the form of the man had vanished.

This incident, trifling as it may seem, kindled instantaneously new hopes in Frascita's breast; she was now evidently not completely deserted. She had seen this man's face before; yes, she was so sure of that.

Presently she began to recollect his features.

It was he who had interposed, though vainly, to save her uncle from the knives of his assassins.

This was enough, under the circumstances, to inspire even confidence in the maiden's breast; hope was there already in full force, and she no longer believed the beldame's tale: every body was deceiving her; she, too, must dissemble.

"Your songs," said Frascita to the old woman, as she returned, "are so beautiful, so wild, so strange, that I suppose they set my senses wandering again. Alas, alas! and is it true that he—the brave, the beautiful, is dead?"

"Have I not told you so already?" said the crone, sharply, and in a tone and with a manner quite different from that she had as yet used.

"Be not angry with my folly, dear mother," said Frascita, in a deprecating manner; "but come, and sing me to sleep with your pretty songs, for, in truth, I am weary and sick at heart."

The old woman, again apparently resuming her insane manner, complied, and commenced singing, in her strange, monotonous voice, pieces of quaint old songs.

The maiden was soon, to all appearance, buried in a profound slumber.

But she knew that Mariquita passed her skinny hands once or twice over her eyes, and listened attentively to her breathing: and then she went out of the room, singing and muttering to herself.

No sooner had she gone out than the maiden, creeping gently along the bed, stood at the open casement.

"Hist, señora," said the gipsy, emerging from the stable and speaking in a whisper in Frascita's ear, as she stooped to listen. "Hist, I heard all: don't believe a word she says—it is all a lie: he is alive and well!"

"And who are you, that you should take an interest in my fate?"

"Never mind who I am," replied the gipsy, sulkily; "that is neither here nor there: but mind, don't be afraid of them, and ride the black horse to-morrow."

"I will, I will," replied the maiden; "but do tell me who sent you, who told you of my being here, and of our leaving this place to-morrow."

"I can tell you no more, my pretty mistress, than that there are others besides the miller—curses on him!—who care for that lovely face of yours. Now don't blush and look angry; but mind and ride the black horse to-morrow, don't forget that."

Frascita was about to question him further, but the gipsy stopped her, saying merely, "Get to bed again, get to bed again, quick, quick." And then he glided away

with noiseless steps, murmuring as he went, "The horse, the horse!"

His quick ear had detected the steps of the old woman as she moved from the other room.

Frascita took the hint, and, before the beldame had opened the door, she was, apparently, fast asleep in the same posture as when Mariquita had gone out.

The old woman again quietly seated herself on the low stool by the bedside, and Frascita could hear her muttering, "There is nobody—the girl's senses must be straying—it is natural enough—yet I wish he would come back, I wish he would come back—I don't like this—can the dead come back again?—I hope not, I hope not!" and the hag visibly shuddered.

Presently she pulled out, from some part of her dress, a long, sharp-pointed knife, and held it up to her eyes. "The spot is there, the spot is still there—it won't come out, it won't come out!"

Frascita, unwilling to hear more of these horrors, which she felt were real, made a movement as if suddenly awakened.

The old woman started, and hurriedly replaced, as she thought, the knife in her dress; but in doing so it slipped from her trembling hands, and, catching in the coverlet of the bed, fell noiselessly on the floor.

Frascita's quick eye perceived this, and as swift as the lightning's flash a burning wish to possess the weapon crossed her mind.

Mariquita, seeing that the maiden was awake, recommenced her singing, and mindful of the miller's injunctions, framed her words so as to bear upon the future fate of the intended victim:—

"From the forest glade
And the cork-tree shade
No more the wild dove roams,
But he plucks his breast
To build a soft nest
For his mate when the springtide comes.

The white sheets are spread,
Hung with garlands the bed,
With roses her blushes to hide,
The priest he is by,
And the powder is dry,
To welcome the brave man's bride."

"Mother," said the maiden, in a soft voice, "can you read dreams? You seem to know every thing, tell me what this means—oh, it was strange and beautiful."

"Can the old Mariquita read dreams?" replied the beldame, repeating Frascita's words; "yes, my beautiful one, yes; it is her business—say on."

"Ah, mother! I thought the bells were ringing merrily, and guns were firing in the still air. The path before me was strewn with myrtles and wild roses; at the end of it was a beautiful church, and at the porch a priest in his vestments beckoned to me

with his finger. A handsome young man was riding by my side, and he spoke softly to me; but as we two rode on, the church receded from us. Still we went on and on, over mountain and through valley, over torrent and through wood—still we could not reach the church. At length we came to an orange-grove. Suddenly I thought to myself, 'This is what prevents us, we have no orange-flowers—let us gather some;' but I found that I could not speak, for my throat was parched and my tongue immovable. My lover perceived my distress, but he knew not what I wanted, and I could not tell him; and in this agony I awoke."

"The girl is certainly gone mad," muttered the crone; "but I might as well gratify her caprice."

This was exactly what the maiden wished.

"Ay," said Mariquita, speaking aloud, "the scent of the orange-blossoms has stolen into the room on the wings of the perfumed air, and the fevered brain of the lovely one wishes for some of the flowers to inhale their dewy fragrance. That is all, my pretty one."

"Is that your reading, mother?" said Frascita, pettishly; "it is dull enough."

"Hush, hush, my darling, don't be angry; I will go and get you some blossoms," said Mariquita, as if soothing a fractious child.

And she went out of the room.

Frascita stooped from the bed and raised the knife. She looked at it for one moment with a bitter smile, and placed it carefully beneath her pillow.

Strange bedfellow for one so young and so lovely!

Mariquita soon returned with a handful of orange-blossoms, which threw a delicious fragrance over the little room; but Frascita did not now seem to care for them, but said, rather petulantly, that she would try and sleep again. The old hag sat down as before by the bedside, but without saying a word, and she soon fell fast asleep.

Frascita closed her eyes and thought deeply, for indeed she had much to reflect upon. In the first place, were this man's words true? or was he only a tool in the miller's hands, a partner in the deception that was being practiced upon her? Why did he say no more, if he really had come there to watch over her safety and assist her in escaping? She would have given worlds for a few minutes' more conversation with him; but that seemed impossible. She pondered on his words, and repeated to herself, a hundred times, "It's all a lie—he is safe and well." Who could this be but Juan, her deeply-loved Juan? But what did the man mean by bidding her be sure and ride the black horse on the morrow? The black horse—that must surely be the one her uncle was riding when he was murdered? And she had seen it again; yes, that was

the horse that was mounted by Mateo in front of the window. She remembered now her uncle having said that, it belonged to her young Carlist; but how was it essential to her escape? Poor girl! she little knew then that had it not been for Barica she would have, perhaps forever, lost all chance of escaping from the miller's clutches.

What if Mateo should not bring the horse back when he himself returned? for return, no doubt, he soon would. But where had he gone, and what was his errand? Oh, how she dreaded the moment when she should hear the tramp of the horses! How should she act? The man had told her not to be afraid of them; but could she conceal her horror if her uncle's murderer appeared in her presence? That, she felt, would be impossible—the actual contact of a ferocious wild beast would be less terrible. Yet, a symptom of fear or distrust might spoil all.

Ever since the world began, women, especially when they are young and in love, have always had more self-possession at their command than men. They can dissemble and hide their feelings with much greater readiness and facility, and in this emergency our heroine proved herself a true woman. She resolved to feign an appearance of contentment with her fate, to receive Mateo kindly, and to betray no suspicion of his motives; to await the event with hope, if not with confidence—and in this she was supported by the belief that her Juan was alive, and would not desert her; and come what come may, to ride the black horse on the morrow if he returned, and, above all, not to part with her friendly weapon. She thought again and again of Juan, and his form rising before her excited senses confirmed her in her resolution. Sooner than wed Mateo she would die, a thousand times die. Then she thought how had her young hero escaped from the toils of his enemies: that he had done so she doubted not, but the how was still a mystery.

At length, wearied with thinking, and still weak from the dreadful shock her nerves had received, the maiden sunk into a gentle slumber.

CHAPTER XI.

Night in the Moraima—The Miller returns—The Black Horse—The Hut is quietted; for what!—The Rescue—The Lovers meet once more.

FRASCITA slept long and soundly, and when she awoke felt hopeful and refreshed. It was night—calm, tranquil, beautiful night. The room was dark; but she felt that she was alone, and all was silent in the hut. The fragrance of the orange-blossoms, refreshed by the cooling dew, stole on the wings of the soft night-breeze through

the open casement. The glistening fireflies glimmered in myriads before the window, now disappearing in the gloom, now shining like stars amid the dark foliage of the tangled thicket. The leaves of the forest-trees sighed and murmured gently as the slender branches waved softly to and fro; there was a sound of water, too, where the little brook babbled over a tiny fall. And then the hoarse booming of the bull-frogs, concealed in the alder-swamp, would come with a melancholy, mournful sound, chiding the stillness of that lovely night; or an owl would hoot from some grim old cork-tree; or a fox would utter his sharp, short bark; or a night-hawk give a feeble cry.

Oh, where is night so lovely as "mid the forest wild?" Once or twice the maiden fancied she could distinguish the sound of footsteps falling lightly on the soft turf; and it seemed to her as if a shadowy, unsubstantial form flitted several times before the open casement, and whispered softly as it glided by—"The horse, the horse!"

But whether it was real, or only fancy, the maiden never knew.

The night is fast waning, and the morning that is to decide her fate is about to dawn. Doubt not that Frascita's heart beat strangely as hope and fear alternated in her breast. She felt under the pillow for her last refuge. It was gone—what did that portend?

Now she remembered that in her dreams she had been lifted gently up and carried to her own sweet mountain-home.

Mariquita must have removed it, then.

The swallows are twittering round the lonely hut, the bee-birds' distant cry is heard in the air—anon they come with brilliant plumage, streaming like meteors through the sky, to revisit their favorite aloë-spikes, for they know that the cups are already replenished with honeyed sweets.

Long shadows fall from the lofty alders upon the smooth turf, even to the hut; and dotted here and there, a few faint, roseate, blushing streaks appear through the clustering foliage. At length Mariquita entered, bearing a large pitcher of cold spring-water.

She laid it down, and motioned to Frascita to arise, but left the room without speaking. Her whole nature seemed suddenly changed, and she no longer had flowers in her hair.

The maiden arose, and, refreshed by the coolness of the limpid, sparkling water, began to arrange the long, lustrous masses of hair which fell in disordered folds almost to the ground, and half concealed and half revealed, as if in modest coquetry, the symmetry of her ivory neck and the snowy whiteness of her budding bosom. Where the roseate light of morning, which now shone through the open window, streamed upon the waving tresses, each hair appeared as a thread of gold; but where the shadows fell, her little white hands seemed to stray through silken

masses, black and glossy as the raven's wing. Her naked feet peeped out, small and delicate as a child's.

Light and life again beamed in those sparkling eyes; and her downy cheeks caught a reflection from the blush of morning. Who could look upon such a figure unmoved?

While the graceful maiden stood there arranging her beautiful hair, forming a picture that Guido might have drawn from, Mariquita again hobbled into the room, bearing in her hand a cup of fragrant chocolate. As she presented it to Frascita, she looked at her with a strange expression, in which pity and admiration were curiously blended with habitual cunning and deceit, and she muttered, in a low but audible voice, "It is too late, it is too late."

"What is too late, mother?" asked Frascita, in a gentle voice.

The hag did not reply for a few moments; but again drawing forth the knife, and again gazing at it with wildness in her looks for more than a minute, she said, as if thinking aloud, "And has one so young, so beautiful, the courage to use this? And would she sooner die than wed one she hates? Ah, maiden, maiden! had I known this before, the old Mariquita might and would have saved you from such a fate; but it is too late now—it is too late now."

"Am I not an Andalusian maiden?" replied Frascita, proudly: "and thinkest thou that force should obtain what the spirit wills not? No, no, mother; it is impossible: I would sooner, sooner die!"

"There was a time," said the hag, musingly, "when I thought as she does." Then, with startling energy, she cried, "Look, maiden, look at that dull spot!—that is not my blood, but the blood of him I hated!"

And Mariquita held up the knife before Frascita's eyes.

"Take it, girl, take it; death is better than misery—misery such as I have endured for years—long, bitter, tearless years: but had I courage such as yours, this, this would not have been."

Suddenly the hag assumed a listening attitude.

"Hark! they come, they come—thy trial, maiden, is at hand! Take it, and if thy heart fails thee in that hour of trial—like mine—like mine—give it back to the old Mariquita."

With trembling but eager hands the maiden took the knife and concealed it in her dress. Mariquita said no more; but commenced, as before, muttering to herself, and singing broken snatches of songs.

The maiden was by this time dressed; and, determined to show that she did not distrust the miller or suspect his motives, she went to the door of the hut to receive him.

The glowing rays of the sun now glancing

through the topmost branches of the alder dazzled her eyes; but still she could see that a man darted out of the stable, with a gun in his hand, and rushed across the glade into the tangled thicket.

Presently she heard, amid the forest-trees, the voices of men, the jingling of little bells, and the low sound of horses' feet on the soft turf. A party of horsemen appeared descending from the hillside into the open glade; and Frascita could distinguish, even at a considerable distance, the tall, stalwart figure of the miller riding the gallant black horse.

Joyful sight for the maiden—the horse had returned! Still she looked anxiously and nervously for the dreaded and bloodthirsty murderer of her uncle; but he was not there. And, instead, there rode behind the miller four men, well mounted and armed; and one of them led a mule gayly caparisoned, and with a woman's saddle on his back.

The miller dismounted, leaving Bavieca loose, and saluted Frascita courteously, complimenting her on her beauty and recovered health; and inquired, even tenderly, if she was well enough to bear the fatigue of a journey.

The maiden, in her turn, received Mateo with smiles; but not for one moment did she forget the mysterious injunction of the swarthy stranger. She patted Bavieca on his arched neck as he stood quietly by; and the noble horse seemed to return her caresses by licking her hand like a dog, as if he knew her, as she said, in reply to the miller's question, "Oh, yes, Mateo, I am quite well; but I should like to ride that pretty, graceful animal. Where did you get him?"

The miller started, and looked suspiciously at Frascita; but quickly recovered his presence of mind as she added, "I don't know him, though the poor fellow seems to know me. Do let me ride him, Mateo—he appears so easy and gentle."

There was nothing unnatural in this, after all; it seemed only a pretty woman's caprice: and so Mateo thought, and he resolved to gratify it; for he was in a high good humor at Frascita appearing to receive him at the door with smiles on her lovely countenance. How could he suspect that she had a motive for doing this?

Did the maiden's conscience smite her at this untruth? If it did, she showed no signs of it then, but appeared cheerful, and even gay.

The miller and the maiden entered the hut, while Bavieca quietly trotted off to the stable; and an hour passed away—an hour of pleasing anticipation to Mateo, but a dreadful one of trembling anxiety and uncertainty to Frascita.

Yet she hoped on, though vaguely and indefinitely. The sun shone out brightly and serenely, illuminating the wild forest

scenery; and the rays fell on the hill clothed with golden broom.

Then the miller arose, and excusing himself by saying that he must go out and see the saddles changed and the horses got ready, left the room; but it was in truth to hear old Mariquita's report of what had passed during his absence.

But the old woman replied, briefly and sulkily, that she had nothing to tell.

Mateo, accustomed to her strange, uncertain manner, thought nothing of this; but, putting some money into her hand, which she held out for the purpose, entered the stable.

The hag clutched the coin eagerly in her skinny fingers, as if she loved its very touch. But when the miller had turned away, so that her movements could not be seen, she threw it from her into the brushwood, muttering, "I can not take it; 'tis the price of blood, 'tis the price of blood."

The sun is behind the hill; the horses are at the door ready for the road; the male is left in the stable, and its saddle is transferred to the broad back of the matchless Bavieca: the miller stands by him, holding in his hand a long leading-rein of platted cord, which is fastened to the headstall of the black horse.

Three of the four smugglers are already mounted; the fourth is on foot: they have all their escopetas ready unslung, as if prepared against some sudden attack.

The maiden is ready; she has sought for the old Mariquita, but in vain—she is not to be found.

Mateo assists her to mount, his frame thrilling at the touch; and seeing her look with surprise at the armed escort, reassures her by saying that it is only a precaution against straggling parties of Carlists: and, taking the leading-rein in his hand, gets on his horse, and they ride away at a footpace.

Scarcely had they disappeared amid the broken hills, when a man, gliding from the thicket, entered the stable, and saddling the mule, led him out, and rode off in the same direction, following their track through the brushwood.

Beautiful Almoraima! many and many a pleasant hour have I spent amid thy green old cork-trees.

I loved thee at all times, and at all seasons. Beautiful wert thou when the startled roe-deer, bounding from the ferny brake where he had made his lair, gazed around with head erect and brilliant eye, as if uncertain whither he should fly; then, as he heard the opening cry of the busy pack—away, away—over brushwood—through brake—down headlong ravine—over rugged water-course—through tangled swamps—away he nimbly fled; while, dashing after him in wild pursuit, the eager chiding of the hounds and the cheering cry of the huntsman echoed merrily through thy wilderness of wood.

Beautiful wert thou, when the fierce, scorching sun glared intensely on the exposed sierra! how cool, how refreshing was thy deep, soft, mellow shade!

Gay flowers clothed the hillsides with a dyed garment of loveliness; the wild vine, festooned in many a graceful fold, curled and twisted around and amid the lofty forest-trees; then the smooth turf, dotted here and there with a densely-foliaged bella sombra, and moist with trickling rills, invited a gallop; and yon sloping bank, o'ershadowed by that quaintly-branching cork-tree, promised a cool reposing-place.

Yes, many and many a time have I, undeterred by robber tales, alone and unarmed, gone to thee, to enjoy thy greenness, thy solitude, thy silent beauty: and, tying my horse to some charred or broken stump, laid myself down beneath some dark-foliaged ilex amid the flowering cistus-bushes, and—shall I say it?—smoked my fragrant cigar.

Thou wert my love, my beauty, then; and still, memory is grateful unto thee.

Slowly through the shady Moraima rode the miller and the maiden.

Had the sylvan beauty of the scene any charm for them? Alas! no.

Mateo was familiar to it; and at that moment Frascita was all in all to him; he saw but her alone. And the maiden's thoughts were wandering after her lost love; or, perhaps she was divining what was yet to come.

They had reached a spot where the road—which was still covered with soft, short turf—became so narrow that only two could with difficulty ride abreast.

On one side, the hills rose nearly abruptly from the path, intersected here and there by a rocky ravine.

On the other lay stretched, for several miles, one of those densely-wooded, tangled, treacherous swamps not unfrequent in the Moraima, impracticable to horses, but a refuge for the hunted deer.

Suddenly the black horse pricked up his pointed ears, and neighed shrilly.

Along the path, as if from an echo, the horse was answered.

The miller quickly checked both the horses—for he still held the leading-rein, and standing up in his stirrups, gazed eagerly down the path; soon his keen eye detected the glancing of arms amid the distant cistus-bushes; the smugglers in the rear closed up at this pause.

The horsemen in front now dashed from their hiding-place, and, appearing in the path, their red caps became suddenly visible.

"The Carlists! the Carlists!" cried the miller's followers, in terror, as they turned their horses round, and, spurring them into a gallop, fled over the smooth sward.

As they in their turn appeared to the gipsy, he sprang from his mule, and darted

into the thick cover of fern and underwood by the road side.

For one moment only was the miller irresolute. He turned the horses round, and, clasping the long leading-rein of the startled Bavioca firmly in one hand, forced both into a gallop.

"Frascita! Frascita!" shouted a well-known voice, "I come, I come."

The maiden strove to check her horse, pulling with all her little strength at the reins, but in vain; for, excited by the shouts, the noise of horses galloping behind him, and seeing others in his front, Bavioca dashed wildly on, stretching himself out as if it was a race.

Still, the sharp bit checked his speed, and the cord was tightened.

"Faster, faster—let his head go," cried the miller, fiercely, and tugging savagely at the leading-rein as Bavioca fell rather behind. Still they gained a little on their pursuers, and Frascita saw it.

What is so quick as thought?

In a moment, a happy moment, the maiden remembered the knife, the old woman's parting gift; the stake was for life and Juan. With reckless courage she dropped the reins on the horse's neck, and drawing the knife from its concealment in her bosom, she stooped forward, and with a quick stroke of its sharp edge, severed the leading-rein; then as quickly dropping it, and recovering the reins, with both her hands and all her force she strove to arrest her horse's headlong flight, as she screamed frantically, "Juan, Juan!"

The miller wheeled suddenly round; but as he did so, Bavioca stopped as suddenly, and fretting at the sharp bit, began to plunge and rear violently.

"Let his head go, girl; he will kill you," again shouted the miller, more fiercely than before.

"I care not," said Frascita, resolutely; "Mateo, I will not fly."

"Then die," cried the miller, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "He shall not have thee;" and drawing a pistol from his sash, he stood up in his stirrups and took a deliberate aim at the shrieking maiden.

Juan saw the action, and he, too, shrieked till the woods rang again.

"Juan, Juan, save me!" screamed Frascita, wildly.

There came a flash, a smoke from the pistol, and then a double report echoed along the tangled swamp. The miller's arm dropped broken and helpless by his side; and the bullet from his pistol found a harmless resting-place in the soft turf.

Half-stunned by the shock, and wholly unconscious of what he was doing, Mateo darted his sharp spurs into his horse's flank, and wheeling him suddenly round, galloped madly away.

Where still the blue smoke hung in wreaths over the fern, and among the leaves of the cistus-bushes, the gipsy's eyes gleamed triumphantly as he passed.

Terrified by the flash, the smoke, and the double report, Bavioca again reared madly up, pawing the air with his fore-feet; and the maiden, exhausted by her efforts, and fainting with fear, slipped gently off from the saddle on to the soft turf.

No sooner had she fallen than Bavioca, as if conscious of what he had done, stood still, trembling in every limb; and, stretching out his long neck, began to lick her hands.

Then, while Juan, flinging himself from his horse, was raising the inanimate form of his mistress, the gipsy, with a wild cry, sprung on Bavioca, and urged him up the steep hill; but it was all too late, for the soldiers, who had but imperfectly seen in the narrow track what had taken place, throwing themselves from their horses, poured a straggling volley after the flying gitano. A bullet struck him on the head, and with one fearful, heart-rending scream, he fell, and his body disappeared amid the closely-matted brushwood.

Juan raised the maiden's drooping head, and frantically kissed those dewy lips. Suddenly, with a thrilling cry of joy, he shouted, "She breathes, she breathes!—water, water!"

Pepe, rushing into the swamp, returned in a moment with his hat full of water, and sprinkled it gently over the maiden's face. With eager and trembling anxiety, Juan watched the effect.

Presently a faint blush flickered beneath the transparent skin of those pallid cheeks; a low, gasping sigh stole through her half-closed lips.

Then, once more, like the first bright sun-ray after the awful hurricane, a soft beam shone out from beneath those silken lashes, and the maiden softly murmured out, "Juan, my beloved Juan, is it indeed thou?"

Thus these two met again.

CHAPTER XII.

Conclusion; containing principally a few remarks on what has gone before.

WITH this scene ended my little guide's tale. Anxious to learn the subsequent fate of the handsome Carlist and the fair Frasquita, for I felt deeply interested in them, I inquired if he knew what became of them afterward. Pepe replied:

"I do not know for certain, señor. The Carlists quitted San Roque in a day or two, and I left about the same time on business of my own. Some say that Colonel Juan was killed by a cannon-shot from one of

your vessels while he was passing along the sand-hills by the Guadarranque; but, I for my part, do not believe it, for the officer who was thus killed rode a white horse, and I know myself that the colonel was mounted on the gallant Bavioca. Besides, some months after the death of Señor Lope (and here my little guide crossed himself and muttered some words of prayer), I was in our great city, Madrid; and one day, when I was drinking wine in a house close by the Puerta del Sol, I overheard some contrabandistas from the north discussing the beauty of a Carlist chief, a lady, and a black horse, whom it seems they had guided through the passes of the mountains into France. One said the man was the handsomest, some the señorita, and others were lost in admiration of the splendid jet-black steed. So you see, señor, it must have been they."

"Without doubt," said I; "and you are Pepito, the arriero of Cordova?"

"Preciso," replied he, grinning.

"And the wooden cross by the alce-flower was to mark where the gallant Lope fell, and that was the stain of his blood on the road?"

Pepe evidently did not relish these questions, but he replied in the affirmative. Then turning his head away, perhaps to hide a tear shed for his dear master's death (though Spaniards are not much given to weeping), he remained silent and uncommunicative for some time afterward.

This little tale, not written for publication, but for my own amusement, to pass away the tedious hours of the long, dreary winter nights in North America, is intended to depict the utter lawlessness and consequent misery of a naturally beautiful and gay country, such as Andalusia, under the blood-stained horrors of an unnatural civil war, and the poor control of a wretched pusillanimous government (if, indeed, it can be so called). Crime produces crime, bloodshed familiarizes men to murder, until man's life becomes of no more value than the reptile's which is crushed beneath the feet. And such was Spain then: and is it better now?

The reality is, in many cases, worse than fiction; and who, conversant with that unhappy country, can say that the picture I have attempted to delineate is too highly colored?

It must not be supposed that this is altogether a work of fiction. Most of the characters, scenes, and incidents, happened either while I was at Gibraltar, or came under my personal experience while traveling in the southern part of Andalusia; and the descriptions are taken from nature. There is one anachronism which it might be as well to mention, namely, that of the

great fair of Ronda being held in the autumn instead of the spring; but it was necessary for the conduct of the story, as the descent of Gómez into Andalusia is historical.

Some of my readers may perhaps recognize in Lope de la Vega the well-known contrabandista Frascito Martínez, of Ximenez. I can see him now, splendidly dressed in the Majo costume, the best-looking, the proudest, the very personification of the haughty Spaniard, crossing with measured steps the crowded bull-ring of that singular and romantic city of the sierras, the indescribable yet lovely Ronda.

The miller of the Moraima is well known to those who at that time followed the Calpe fox-hounds into the recesses of that glorious forest. To the officers of the garrison of Gibraltar I believe he was uniformly civil; but there is no doubt that he had killed, with his own hand, many individuals—it was then supposed to the number of seven—and one under very singular circumstances, namely, the one alluded to in the story by Pepe the Arriero. This ferocious man's mill was burned by the Carlists in the autumn of 1836, and I believe his only child perished in the flames. The scene in the venta near the mouth of the Guadiara is taken from what I saw there while on a sporting excursion from Gibraltar, for the sake of shooting and the fly-fishing, both of which were capital in their way.

The chase and the escape of the smuggling craft, nearly as I have related, actually occurred; and as I was an eye-witness of it, and the manner in which it was effected, I can vouch for the fact, although it may seem improbable and exaggerated to my nautical friends. The scene, I remember, was heightened by a splendid thunder-storm bursting over the Sierra Vermeja.

The little Pepita and the old Carlist are no creations of my pen.

This damsel, pretty and graceful as a fawn, came dancing up to me in one of the courts of the Alhambra to present me with a nosegay of fresh-gathered flowers with the dew still hanging about their petals.

The old man I encountered in that most detestable even of Spanish inns, the Fonda de la Diligencia at Cordova, while I was waiting for a conveyance to take me on to Seville, two diligences having been just burned by the Carlinos on the Madrid road: if I mistake not, Borrow mentions the same old man.

The Moraima, or Almoraima, so often mentioned in the tale, is a vast and extremely wild and picturesque district of forest, which extends from the Guadiara to the Guadarranque, about fifteen miles from east to west, and nearly ten from south to north, from a few miles behind San Roque to Castellar.

This district is well worthy the attention

of the botanist and the natural historian, for it abounds with a wonderful variety of beautiful plants, shrubs, flowers, and animals.

The principal timber-trees contained in this vast forest are the different kinds of the robur and the ilex, the most common being the sweet acorn-oak (*quercus ballota*), and the cork-tree (*quercus suber*); besides these, the ilex (*quercus ilex*), the true British oak (*quercus pedunculata*), and the beech-oak (*quercus faginea*), are sometimes met with; but the two first form the leading and prominent feature of the landscape.

In the swamps, or sotos, the common alder (*alnus glutinosa*), the black alder (*rhamnus frangula*), from which the best charcoal is made, the weeping birch (*betula pendula*), the white poplar (*populus alba*), thrive in the moist, black soil, often festooned with wild vines and other parasitical plants.

In the open glades are found the olive, the thorn, the bella sombra, the chestnut, the orange-tree, and the fig, besides an infinity of others too numerous and varied for any but a botanist to describe.

Along the little rills which trickle through the soft turf grow the pink-flowering cleander and the rhododendron, to which resort, at certain seasons of the year, multitudes of small birds. The denizens of this lovely district are varied and numerous—wild boars, wolves, foxes, roe-deer, hares, rabbits, badgers, hedgehogs, raccoons, and, I believe, porcupines, are to be met with: red-legged partridges, woodcocks, wild pigeons, and doves abound. The bee-bird (*merops apiaster*) flits round the flowering shrubs with its singular flight and strange cry, devouring the bees and sucking the honey like the humming-bird, a species of which I have often met with, but of duller colors than many of its tropical brethren. Another lovely bird, the hoopoe (*upupa epops*), is not uncommon; and the night-jar (*caprimulgus*) glides on noiseless wings along the dark, rocky ravines, uttering its harsh and singular noise. Eagles and hawks vary the scene; and overhead a string of huge, gaunt vultures are wending their way through the trackless sky toward Africa. Near the entrance into the forest, where the river Guadarranque flows through a grassy level flat, where grow multitudes of lilies, I have sometimes seen the scarlet and white flamingo, and that most elegant of all birds, the snow-white egret.

Half-wild, fierce-looking cattle rush out on the unwary traveler from the shade of some densely-foliaged thicket, and vast herds of black pigs revel in luxuriance beneath sweet-acorned oaks, and the deep note of the herdsman's cow-horn echoes through the forest. Altogether there is a surpassing charm in this beautiful sylvan district.

The underwood, which in many parts is very dense, is principally composed of fern,

broom, furze, wild myrtle, and various kinds of cistus, mingled with wild roses and an infinity of other flowering shrubs.

The hillsides and the open grassy glades are adorned with a profusion of wild flowers of fragrant smell and brilliant hues.

The scenery is wild, and yet park-like and ever-varying. Every now and then the horseman comes upon a rocky, impracticable ravine, or a densely-wooded and impenetrable swamp. These sotos are always a sure find for the Calpe fox-hounds, and many a brilliant woodland run have I seen from them.

A mystery has always hung over Gomez after his retreat from San Roque. I well remember the reports that were in circulation at Gibraltar concerning him. Some said that he was betrayed by his own party, who were jealous of his talents; others, that he himself was the traitor, and had been bought with Christino gold. Then came an account of his having been tried by a court-martial and shot: after that he certainly did disappear from Spain; at all events, he never afterward played a prominent part. This really talented general is, I believe, at this

moment a *détenu*, if not actually a prisoner in the south of France, I believe at Bayonne.

The Arab custom of firing off guns at a wedding is still kept up in Andalusia. I remember seeing a bridal party near Gaudia, where the men were blazing away their powder in fine style. I had intended to have followed my little intelligent guide over the wild sierras to other scenes. But, alas! the leviathan Ford has swept over all that country with his giant pen, and left no crumbs behind for a hungry writer to pick up; and so, as I was answered by *mine host* when arriving, tired, hungry, and thirsty at La Nueva Venta (near Louisiana), "No hay nada, ni pan, ni sal, ni vino, ni agua." One egg there was, but what was that among four ravenous wayfarers? Columbus himself, with his experience of eggs, could not have settled the question of the partition of this one.

From Spain to where Columbus went is a natural transition, and there, if this little work should please the public, I intend to proceed with my pen, as I did with my person.

THE END.

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1867, Nov. 9
From the Long Street Office

OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

BY THE HON. MRS. NORTON.

CHAPTER I.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

THERE is no example of human beauty more perfectly picturesque than a very handsome man of middle age.

No, smiling reader, not even a very handsome young man: not even that same man in his youth. The gain is in expression; of which every age has its own, and perhaps there is more change in that than in the features, under the working hand of Time. When luckless Dr. Donne wrote to the proud mother of the famous George Herbert of Bemerton and Lord Herbert of Cherbury —

“Nor spring nor summer beauty hath the
grace,
That I have seen in an autumnal face,”

it is to be feared he was more complimentary than veracious; for bloom is an integral part of woman's loveliness, and every day that brings her nearer to its withering takes away something of her charm. But with the other sex it is different. The youth who is noble-looking, glad, eager, gallant and gay as the young Lochinvar, will yet be handsomer when time shall have given him that air of customary command, of mingled majesty, wisdom, and cordial benevolence, which belongs to a later date; and which, in fine natures, results from much mingling with the joys, sorrows, and destinies of other men, with an increased instead of a diminished sympathy in all that concerns them. Often, too, this is accompanied by a genial cheerfulness of manner, springing from the same source. At the age of which I am speaking, small annoyances have ceased to afflict: great hopes and fears are subject to a more noble reserve: the pas-

sionate selfishness of inexperience has vanished: the restlessness of learning how much or how little life can achieve is calmed down. The smile of welcome in such a man's countenance is worth all the beauty of his adolescent years.

And if there should be any of my readers who, in spite of this argument, refuse to become converts to such unusual doctrine, and obstinately adhere to a contrary opinion, — that is because they never saw SIR DOUGLAS ROSS of GLENBOSSIE, familiarly called by his tenantry and his few remaining family ties, “Old Sir Douglas.”

He had indeed been called by that name before he could reasonably be said to have earned it: before his dark and thickly-curled hair had shown any of those rare silver streaks which the American poet, Longfellow, beautifully images as the

“Dawn of another existence, when this world's
troubles are over.”

He was called Old Sir Douglas, chiefly, as it seemed, because everybody else was so young. His father had run away with a beautiful and a penniless Miss Macrae, when he was scarcely twenty. At five-and-twenty he was a widower with two infant sons; and by way of at once satisfying his family, re-deeming the past, and giving a second mother to those young children, he wedded with the heiress of Toulmains; a very stiff and starched successor to the blooming and passionate girl whom he had laid in her grave so early that his union with her grew to be a vague dream rather than a distinct memory.

But the sunshine was off the path of his life for ever: and perhaps that instinct of insufficiency to another's happiness, which haunts the hearts of those who live in intima-

cy together even when those hearts are not very tender, crept into the hard shell where beats a sort of cold fish-life, in the bosom of the second lady Ross, and soured still further a nature never genial. Hateful to her was the memory of that first wife; displeasing to the last degree the sight of her orphan children and the sound of their prattle. She spent her time in steady efforts at repression, and at a series of inventive punishments, principally directed against the sin of liveliness.

She did not relax in her system even after she herself became a mother; and the little pale, shrewd, sharp-browed half-sister she gave the boys, seemed indeed to have been modelled on her own pattern. Still, resolute, and reserved, that tiny girl foreshadowed the woman to be, and faithfully transmitted the soul and spirit of her progenitrix.

Young as the first brood were when they lost their loving mother, they felt the change. Home was home still, but it was home *frappé à la glace*; and the efforts of Lady Ross to train and nail them as snow-berries not only failed, but produced, as years went on, a sort of chronic state of rebellion; inasmuch that, even had her wishes been reasonable and gently expressed (two conditions that never existed), I fear she would have found the two boys, Douglas and Kenneth, wilfully provided with a stock of ready-made opposition.

In a household where the sole break in the monotony of discontent was a change from storms to sullenness on the part of the governing authority, and a corresponding change from passion to dejection in the young things that were to be governed, it was not to be expected that nature should be properly disciplined, or minds effectually taught. The boys learned as little as they could, and resisted as much as they dared. Their affection for each other was proportionate to their isolation at home, and before they were severally nine and ten years old, their chief pleasure was to roam over the hills behind the castle, their arms twined round each other's necks, talking of the insupportable tyranny of stepmothers, as set forth in all the stories they had ever read, and planning wild and boyish attempts at escape from such thralldom. From their father they received neither instruction nor guidance. Tormented and disappointed himself, his weak and impulsive nature took that turn to evil from which perhaps a pious, cheerful, loving helpmate might have saved him. Captious in his temper, drunken in his habits, given greatly to those open griev-

ous twits and taunts in the wars of home, which seem to lookers-on so indecent and embarrassing, — and which a man should be taught to govern and conceal in his soul, as he is taught to clothe the nakedness of his body, — his children combined an utter absence of respect for him with a certain degree of prejudiced pity. If they did not think him always in the right in the family quarrels they witnessed, at least they always thought their stepmother in the wrong. "Poor papa" was their kindest mention of him; and "papa's too lazy to care" the common salvo to their conscience when doing something that had been absolutely forbidden.

At length came that crisis in their child-life, which might be expected. Among the smaller obstinacies about which papa was "too lazy to care," and which was the subject of fierce reprobation with their stepmother, was the constant presence of two rough terriers, which had been given the two boys in the earliest stage of their mutual puppyhood by the old keeper. Jock and Beardie were installed as idols in their masters' hearts. Rustling through the brushwood, leaping over the purple heather, panting through the brawling burns, covered with dust or drenched with rain, as the case might be — in rushed, with a scuffle and a yelp of joy, sniffing for drink or scratching for a comfortable resting-place, these four-footed plagues, as Lady Ross termed them; following, or followed by, the kilted little lads. During the brief period allotted to their careless lessons, dog and master eyed each other with an equally intelligible agreement to "go out the moment it was over," when, — as if at the sound of a signal gun, — the scuffle, shout, yelp, and rush were renewed. Often had Beardie been chased angrily with a whip, to teach him indoors manners; often had Jock been seized by the scruff of his shaggy neck, and tossed out of the low windows; often pulled out from slumbers surreptitiously permitted in the tumbled beds of their sleeping masters; often made to howl for flagrant discovery of bones half gnawed, and fragments of victuals, under those same little couches; often shaken out rudely on the bare floor when curled up for a nap in the plaided counterpanes. But it was in vain that Lady Ross scolded and stormed. The dogs did not understand what she would be at, and the boys were determined that where they went Jock and Beardie should follow.

On one especial day, the rushing, yelping, shouting, and scuffling, which attended their entrance seemed redoubled: the boys

had fallen in with an otter hunt, conducted by an experienced old gillie, their chief friend on the estate. They entered flushed, wet, panting, and joyous, leaving every door on their progress open, including that of the wide oak hall, through which a whirl of wind and autumn leaves followed their reckless little heels, as if willing to share in the sport and the confusion. Then dog and master, alike muddy, breathless, and dripping, burst into the presence of Lady Ross, even as she sat in the state drawing-room receiving the somewhat formal visit of the most puissant of all her Scotch neighbours, the dowager Countess of Clochnaben and the invalid earl her son.

"Are those Sir Neil's boys? They seem rudish little bears," was the polite speech of the dowager, as she hastily drew her ample dress nearer the boundary of the sofa, where the ladies were seated.

"I told you to hinder that sort of thing," said the irate hostess to her husband after her guests had departed.

"How am I to hinder it?" sulkily replied he. "I'm just wishing you'd let the lads and their dogs be."

Then rose one of those wild storms about nothing, which are at once the curse and the wonder of ill-mated married life: the wife "flying" at the husband; the husband swearing at the wife; the children staring at the loud battle and angry gestures; till, a portion of the wrathful torrent of violence being turned their way, they were ordered off to "make themselves decent for supper."

That supper was not eaten, nor greeted otherwise than with bitter cries and regretful tears; for, when the boys recrossed the great hall adorned with the antlers of innumerable stags, they were met by their incensed stepmother. She pointed fiercely through the great arched door, calling out, "Since there's neither teaching nor managing will rule ye, and your father lets you run wild, we'll see if I can find means to make more impression:—I think you'll not forget to-day's otter hunt in a hurry."

Through the arch the boys gazed, in the direction indicated by her gaunt finger, and then stood as though she had turned them into stone by some weird spell. For there, on the two lower branches of a stunted old fir-tree, just outside the castle door, hung the two dogs; horrid in their recent death by strangulation; pitiful in their helpless dangling attitudes; executed by a sudden doom! Poor Jock, whose warm kindly brown eyes and rough nose were wont to bury themselves under Douglas's caressing

arm; and Beardie, handsome, active, and frolicsome Beardie, who had leaped so high to Kenneth's stick, and whose long silky coat of iron grey hair had been the admiration of all beholders! There they hung! wet and dragged and weary-looking, as when they came in: but never more to dry their coats by the fire; or lap from the great bowl of water set ready for them by the boys; or lick the tanned little hands, in mute joy and gratitude, at the end of some pleasant day! There they hung: tongues out; eyes glazed; limbs contracted with horrid evidences of a bygone struggle ending in a helpless death.

Kenneth was the first to break silence; with a cry that was almost a yell of despair and defiance, he made a dash towards the tree, opening his knife as he went, to cut his favourite down. Douglas stood still; panting, speechless, and breathless; his eyes riveted on poor Jock, as though he had no power to withdraw them from the dreadful sight. Then followed, from both boys, a wild echoing shout for their father—for their father to come and see what had been done by them during the brief interval they had spent in preparations for a more decent appearance in the sitting-room and at the family meal.

Nor did the easily excited ire of that father disappoint the boys' expectations. It went beyond them: it alarmed them by its excess. Louder and more furious, and more intermixed with oaths, grew Sir Neil's rapid phrases of reproach to his wife, as the boys, sobbing and exclaiming, kissed the corpses of their canine companions; and, at length, as with fierce and fearless defiance, taunt for taunt returned in the shrillest of voices, Lady Ross made a step or two in advance towards her husband, the latter seized her by the shoulders; shook her violently; and, with the exasperated words that she had "done an ill devil's deed,"—and he "wished from his soul she was hanging up alongside of the dogs," he thrust her from him against the tall, heavy, hatstand that stood at the hall-door. The hatstand fell over with a crash; and, though Lady Ross recovered her balance with a staggering effort, and did not fall, the excitement of the scene proved too much for Douglas, who, throwing himself between the contending parties with a piteous exclamation of horror, suddenly dropped at his father's feet in a dead faint.

He was a fine robust boy; and, the burst of emotion and its consequences once over, he rapidly became himself again. But neither of the lads would come in to supper, or give any attention to the persistent lea-

turing with which they were favoured by their stepmother. They remained out in the early moonlight till they had buried their dogs; came in, and went heavily up to their own room, where they were yet heard sobbing and talking for a while; and, in the morning, the two little rebels were missing. They had run away.

The preparations made by children on these occasions are not very extensive. A bag of oatmeal, a few apples, and a very slender remainder of pocket-money, would not have taken them far on their projected road to high fortune; though in their first eager four miles they had considered it quite a settled thing that Douglas should become a warrior and statesman like the Duke of Wellington, and Kenneth, at the very least, Lord Mayor of London.

They were pursued and brought back—footsores, hungry, and exhausted,—at the end of their first day's march; before they had got even to the suburbs of the market-town from which this plunge into worldly success was to be made.

While they crept once more (less loth than boyish pride might have avowed) into their accustomed beds, a parental council was held. Lady Ross was of opinion that they should both be “flogged for their escapade within an inch of their lives;” her husband, that no further notice should be taken of it, since they probably had had a sickening of such attempts, in their failure and fatigue. But the upshot of the debate was, that Douglas and Kenneth were parted; the elder sent to Eton for civilized training, in token of a certain concession to Lady Ross's English views on the subject; and the younger delivered over in gloom and disgrace to a neighbouring Scotch minister, who had one other forlorn pupil, and a reputation for patient teaching.

Undoubtedly the best education for man or boy is to mingle much with his fellows; and that is why a man educated at a public school is in general better educated than one who has received tolerably careful training at home. Lessons may not be so well learned, but Life is learnt; emulation is roused; the mind is not allowed to roost and slumber, like a caged bird on a perch. Douglas Ross owed to his inimical stepmother an immense service as to his future; though in her disposal of him she had merely consulted her desire to be rid of him, and certain consequential notions of how “the heir” should be educated. Had she had a boy of her own, perhaps some grudging might have mingled with such plans; but the sharp-browed Alice was her only

child, and was an interest apart, and, in fact, subordinate, to Lady Ross's feelings of family consequence. Young Douglas would have justified a nobler pride. Frank, intelligent, spirited, and yet amenable to true discipline now that such discipline had replaced the alternate neglect and tyranny of home, he was popular alike with masters and companions; while the simplicity of such early training as he had had, rendered him insensible to the shallow compliments of strangers, struck with his personal beauty and free untutored grace of manner.

The holidays of many a “half” to come, were days of rapture. To see Kenneth waiting and watching under the tall fir-trees at the turn of the road where the mail-coach was to drop him; to leap down, and strain him to his heart; to exhibit his prize-books, on which the younger brother would gaze with a sigh of curiosity—and then to plunge back into the wild happy life of the Highlands,—this made home a temporary paradise. “Days among the heather” are days which, to those who have been brought up in the wild mountain-life of Scotland, are days of intoxicating joy. Once more with his brother; once more in his kilt, clambering here and there, lounging under the silver birches by the blue lake's side, gliding over its silver surface in the coble-boat, fishing for trout, and waking the echoes, as they rowed home, with many a snatch of song; uncovering his glossy head for very sport in the sudden shower, and feeling a wild delight in the mountain storms;—young Douglas's holidays for the first three years were days of unalloyed delight.

Then came the gradual change which circumstances bring,—a change which is not exactly alienation, but separation, between those who are differently situated as to occupations, associations, and aims. A certain discontent, instead of approbation, took possession of his father's mind. The prize-books were tossed aside, with some discouraging observation as to the value of “book-learning,” and the absurd disproportion of such rewards with the expense of such an education. Douglas himself had a sorrowful instinct that Kenneth's life was narrowing round him,—he was a companion in all purposeless pursuits to his father, but the main elements of improvement were wanting. He smoked and sat up drinking whisky-toddy,—he shot and walked with Sir Neil. But he did nothing, and learnt nothing. It was neither the life of a boy nor a man; and the dawdling leisure left from its loose occupations was spent by

Kenneth in familiar visitings wherever a pretty face smiled on the threshold of a farmhouse, or a bothy in the glen; in idle talk with gamekeepers, farmers, and petty tenants; and in making love betwixt jest and earnest to the miller's daughter at the falls of Torrieburn; Torrieburn being a small separate estate of Sir Neil's, which was settled on his younger son.

In his own loving earnest way, Douglas hinted good counsel, but without good effect. Kenneth was angry; was saddened; was somehow suspicious that his Eton brother was "coming the fine gentleman over him;" and a coldness stole between them, dreamy and impalpable as the chill white mist which rises among the hills at the beginning of winter, and hides all our pleasant haunts and familiar trysting-places with its colourless and ghostlike veil.

With his stepmother he was on even worse terms than during his comfortless boyhood. Disliking her profoundly, and yet attempting a certain show of courtesy to his father's wife, his reward was only the bitter sneer with which she spoke of him as "that very stately and gentlemanly young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross."

With his father he was restless and uncomfortable. Too young when a resident at home, in the memorable days of the dog-hanging, to be the companion Kenneth had gradually become, and old enough now to see all the defects of such companionship, he inwardly groaned in spirit at his own incapacity to give or to receive satisfaction from communion with one who in his best days was a poor specimen of what the head of a family should be, and whose worst days were now come — days of mingled apathy and discontent, of absolute repugnance to the nearest tie in it, his irritable and irritating wife; of selfish craving for what amusement or comfort he could get out of the society of the half-educated lad he had kept at Glenrossie without a thought of his future; and of angry surprise at the transformation, as it seemed to him, of the lovely, ardent boy whose small rebellions against discipline and lady Ross he had so often protected, into the proud, thoughtful adolescent, who "seemed to think he would advise the whole family."

In this state of mind was Sir Neil, when Douglas asked that his brother might be put to some profession, and that he himself might be sent to one of the universities; and for once Sir Neil and Lady Ross united their discordant voices in a chorus of agreement, holding that his demands were preposterous, and not to be granted.

Sir Neil considered that already he had had to much of "book-learning," which was "never of much use," and Lady Ross told him that he was "puffed with presumption" in venturing to chalk out for himself what was to be done.

Even Kenneth, the loved and clung-to Kenneth, was provoked; and hastily assured his brother it was lucky he had not succeeded in persuading his father, for that he, Kenneth, would certainly not have gone to study for any profession whatever. He ment to live at Torrieburn, and there'd always be grouse and oatcake enough to satisfy his notions of life. The tears started into Douglas's eyes, — but there was no one to heed or understand what passed in his heart; and no evidence of that day's mental struggle, except in a brief letter to his Eton "chum," Lorimer Boyd; younger son of that Dowager Clochnaben whose visit with the sickly young Earl to Glenrossie had been the exciting cause of the sudden execution of Jock and Beardie, and the exile of the runaway boys. The letter ran as fellows: —

"TO LORIMER BOYD, ESQ.,

"*Balmossie, N. B.*

"MY DEAR LORIMER, — I am not to go to college; so I shall see no more of you at present! My father has consented, however, to my entering the army. Heaven grant I may do something more with life than accept the bare fact of living! Kenneth is to remain on at home. I am sorry for Kenneth. Such a fine, quick, handsome lad! I wish you could see him. I wish my father had given him a chance. Do not forget me, old fellow; I shall never forget you. I send you a little Elzevir 'Horace' you and I used to read sometimes together under the trees by the river that hot summer, when you sprained your arm, and had to give up rowing in the boats. I would be glad you wrote to me. I am sure you will, Lorimer. I don't mind owing to you that I feel so lonesome and disappointed I could cry like a girl. I hope you will distinguish yourself at college; you were much the cleverest fellow at Eton. I end with a *nil desperandum*; for, after all, I trust to our future meeting. You are a Scotchman, and so am I; and some day, I suppose, I shall be at home again. Meanwhile, since I cannot be at college, I am glad to be a soldier.

"Yours, ever,

"DOUGLAS ROSS."

CHAPTER II.

PASSING AWAY.

If there were not daily examples to familiarize us with the marvel, we might wonder at the strange way in which Nature asserts herself, or the effects of Nature and accident combined, in the characters of individuals. We see children, all brought up in one home, under the same tutelage, as different as night from day. Pious sons and daughters sprung from infidel and profligate parents; unredeemed and incorrigible rascals from honest and religious fathers; fools, that fritter away the vanishing hours they themselves scarcely know how, born where steady conduct and deep knowledge seemed the very life of those around them, — and earnest, intelligent, and energetic souls springing up, like palm-trees in the desert sand, where never a thought has been given to mental culture or religious improvement.

Out of that home which looked so stately and beautiful among the surrounding hills, and held such grovelling inmates — the castled home of Glenrossie — went forth at least one scion of the good old name worthy to bear it. Douglas Ross drew his sword in the service of his country, in India, in America, and in China; he rose rapidly to command, and proved as strict in authority as he had formerly been in obedience. Beloved, respected, and somewhat feared, his name was one already familiar in men's mouths, as having greatly distinguished himself in the profession he had chosen, when he was recalled to Scotland, with leave of absence from the military command he held, to attend the rapidly succeeding death-beds of his father and brother.

Whether, in dying, some dim consciousness of his folly and injustice smote Sir Neil, — or that he was merely haunted by his lingering love for the son who had been left with him through recent years, — he made a sort of appeal to the elder when bending anxiously over him to gather the failing words. "You'll look after Kenneth," he said, "he has greatly mismanaged — You'll help him — Torrieburn's been ill sorted — He's let himself down, rather — with those people. I — Be good to Kenneth — Maybe he'll settle in the way of marriage, and do well yet. You'll have to make amends to —"

Sir Neil made great efforts to conclude this sentence, but was unable; he held convulsively by his son's hand, looked in his

face with that dying wistfulness which, once seen, is never forgotten, and fell back on the pillow exhausted — the anxieties, errors, and hopes of this world at an end for ever.

Brief was the time allotted to Douglas for any obedience to his father's dying wishes, as far as his brother was concerned. Kenneth had insisted on riding home to Torrieburn every night, in spite of the urging of his brother. He did not seem to believe the end so near. He was wilful as to being at home in his own bachelor abode. He hated his stepmother, he said, and his half sister, and did not wish to see any of their mock grief for the father, who had at least treated him always with affection.

The night that father died, he rode away as usual. Torrents of rain, swept to and fro by the wild gusts of an autumnal storm, whistling and moaning through the ancient fir woods at the back of the castle, greeted his departure. The crash of trees blown down, the roar of the swollen torrent, sounded loud in the ear of his brother, as he stood grasping his hand at the open door, and bidding him good night. "If you will, you will, Kenneth; you were always a wilful fellow; but what a night!" and for a few minutes yet, Douglas Ross watched the receding form, full of grace and activity, of the handsome rider. "I shall be with you early in the morning," were his last words, as he waved his hand and put spurs to his horse. But neither that nor any other morning ever brought Kenneth Ross to the castle again. Their father died in the night; and Douglas was still pondering over the anxious, needless recommendation of his brother to his kindness, when the day dawned, as it had set, in storms of drenching rain.

Plans of affection, of hope, rational useful plans, chased each other like the wind-borne clouds through the mind of the new-made heir of Glenrossie. Yes, he *would* "look after Kenneth," — Kenneth, and Torrieburn, and every fraction of his destiny! He would set that destiny to rights. He would think over a suitable marriage for him. He would give, lend, do anything to get him out of the embarrassments his father had hinted at. And then he remembered the other concluding sentence of that father's dying voice: "You'll have to make amends to" — To whom? Could it be some one who had already assisted Kenneth? Or perhaps to his stepmother? Sir Neil had never uttered his wife's name; he had begged she might not be present while he talked with his son at that solemn midnight hour. He meant to

see her again in the morning. Could he have been going to recommend her also to Douglas's kindness?

He went to her room to break the news. He found her cold, impassive; indifferent to the fact; suspicious of his intentions. She pronounced but one sentence: it was, "You are aware, I suppose, that I've a right to stay at the castle for a year from this date?" Her daughter was with her; she also looked at Douglas with her grave shrewd eyes. There was a certain beauty of youth and girlhood about her, and her half-brother gazed at her with pity. He took her hand and said gently, "Even if there were no right, do you think I would drive you away? This is Home."

Ailie drew her little thin hand out of his, as though she had been slipping off a glove. She sat mute. She gave no token even of having heard him, except withdrawing her eyes from his face, and casting a sidelong furtive glance at her rigid mother.

While Sir Douglas still lingered—in the sort of embarrassment felt by warm-hearted persons who have made a vain demonstration of sympathy—a sudden tumult of vague sounds, the arrival of a horseman, the chatter of servants, the flinging open of doors, struck heavily through the silence of the room. "There is Kenneth!" said Sir Douglas, as he hastily turned and opened the door into the broad handsome corridor at the head of the great oak staircase immediately fronting the entrance. The old butler was already there: he put his hands out as if deprecating the advance of a step: "Mr. Kenneth was thrown from his horse last night, sir, and the doctor says he'll no live till the morrow," was all he could utter.

Another death-bed—another and a dearer!

Sir Douglas rode to Torrieburn almost as desperately as his brother had done the night before. He found the handsome rider he had fondly watched at his departure, a bruised, shattered, groaning wretch. His horse, over-spurred, and bewildered by the drifting rain and howling storm, had swerved on the old-fashioned, sharp-angled bridge that crossed the Falls of Torrieburn, close to his home, and had dashed with his rider over the low parapet in among the rocks below.

Close to home; luckily, close to home!

Near enough for the wild shout he gave as he fell, and even the confused sound of the roll of shaken-down stones, and terrible weight of horse and rider falling on the bed of the torrent, to reach the house, and the

quick ear of one who was waiting and watching there. For Kenneth's bachelor home was not a lonely one. Startling was the picture that presented itself in that drear morning's light when Sir Douglas entered. The weariest frightened form he ever beheld in the shape of woman, sate at the foot of the bed. Untidy, dishevelled, beautiful; her great white arms stretched out with clasped hands, shuddering every time that Kenneth groaned; her reddish-golden hair stealing in tangled locks from under the knotted kerchief, which she had never untied or taken off since she had rushed out into the storm and scrambled down to the Falls the night before. The lower part of her dress was still soaked and dripping, covered with mud and moss—one of her loose stockings torn at the ankle, and the blood oozing through—her petticoat, too, torn on that side: she had evidently slipped in attempting to reach the horse and rider. Douglas spoke first to her, and he spoke to her of herself, not of his brother.

"Och!" she said, and her teeth chattered as she spoke—"ye'll no mind me, sir! it's naething. I just drappit by one hand frae the brae, in amang the stanes to get at him, and sae gat hurtit. Ou Kenneth! Kenneth! Kenneth! Ou my man! my ain man!" and, rocking wildly to and fro, while the rain beat against the window, and the storm seemed to rock the trees in unison with her movements, she ceased to speak.

The dying man moved his lips with a strange sort of smile, but no sound came. Douglas knelt down by him, and, as he did so, was conscious of the presence of a little nestling child, the most lovely little face that ever looked out of a picture, that was sitting at the bed-head, serene and hopeful in all this trouble, and saying to him with a shy smile—"Are ye the doctor? and will ye put daddy a' richt? We've been waiting lang for the doctor."

No doctor could save Kenneth—no, not if the aching heart of his elder brother had resolved to bring him life at the price of his whole estate. He was fast going—fast! The grief of the ungovernable woman at his bed-foot only vaguely disturbed him. He was beginning to be withdrawn from earthly sights and earthly sounds. But Sir Douglas tried to calm her. He besought her to be still; to go away and wash her wounded limb and tear-swollen face, and arrange herself, and return, and meanwhile he would watch Kenneth till the doctor came. No, she wouldn't—no, she couldn't—no, he might die while she was out of the way—

no, she "wad see the last o' him, and then dee." She offered no help; she was capable of no comfort; she kept up her loud lament, so as to bewilder all present, and it was a positive relief to Sir Douglas when, with a sudden shiver through her whole frame, she slid from the bed-foot to the floor in a swoon.

By this time the doctor had arrived, with an assistant, both of them common "bone-setters" from the village of Torrieburn—rough, untutored, but not unkindly; and perhaps in nothing more kind than in the honest admission that beyond giving restoratives for the time being, and shifting the bed a little, so as to lessen (not remove) the great agony of human pain that must preface this untimely death, they could do nothing.

Do NOTHING! very solemn and trying are such death-beds; when human love, that seems so strong, stands helpless; listening to the great dreadful sentence, "You shall see this man whom you love pass to the presence of his Creator in torments inconceivable, and you shall not be able to lift away, no, not so much as one grain of his bitter pain, though you would give half your own life to do it."

God's will be done! Oh! how hollow sound even those solemn words! while we echo, as it were, the writhing we look on at, in the thrill of aching sympathy that goes through our own corporeal frame; and wait, and wait, and wait, and know that only Death—only Death—can end the anguish; and that, when he has ceased to suffer, we are alone for ever in the great blank. No more to hear his voice, no more to clasp his hand, no more to be conscious of his love; but to know that somewhere there is a grave, where he who suffered so much lies stiff and still,—and that "his spirit has returned to God who gave it."

When the doctor had arranged that dying bed for the best,—and had attended to the miserable woman who had fainted, and had brought her back, pale, exhausted, but quieter, to the sick chamber,—Kenneth made a feeble effort to raise himself; an exertion which was followed by a dreadful groan. Then he murmured twice the name of "Maggie!—dear Maggie!" and Sir Douglas rose up, and made way for the trembling creature so called upon, to kneel down in his place; adjuring her, for the love of heaven—for the love of Kenneth—not to give way, but keep still; getting only from her a burst of sobbing, and the words, "Kill me, och! kill me! and then maybe ye'll hush me down." There seemed no

"hushing her down," till suddenly Kenneth said, in a sort of dreamy voice, "Maggie, you'll call to mind the birken trees—the birken trees!"

The woman held her breath. There was no need to quiet her now:—

"The birken trees by the broomy knowe," repeated he dreamily; and, in a low clear tone, he added—"I'm sorry, Maggie."

Then, opening his eyes with a fixed look, he said, "Dear Douglas!" in a tone of extreme, almost boyish tenderness; and then followed a renewed silence; broken only by the wild gusty winds outside the house, and the distant sound of the fatal Falls of Torrieburn. All at once, with the rallying strength that sometimes precedes death, he spoke clearly and intelligibly: "Douglas! be kind—I'm going—I'm dying—be kind to my Kenneth, for the sake of days when we were boys together!—Don't forsake him! don't deny him! Have pity on Maggie!"

A little pause after that, and he spoke more restlessly: "I'm asking others, and I ought to do it myself. It's I who forsake him. It's I that didn't pity. I say—I say—are you all here? Douglas! the doctor—ah! yes, and my father's factor,—Well—I"—

He struggled for a moment, with blue blanched lips, and, feeling for the little curled head of the child, at the further side of his bed, and locking his right hand in the hand of the kneeling woman, he said, "I trust Douglas with these. I declare Margaret Carmichael my Wife, and I acknowledge Kenneth Carmichael Ross as my lawful son!"

The woman gave a suppressed shriek: she sprang up from her knees, and flung her arms round the dying man, with a wild, "Oh, I thank ye! I thank ye! and mither 'll thank ye for ever! Ou! my Kenneth!"

He turned his head towards her with that unutterable smile that often flits over dying faces. Brighter and fonder his smile could not have been in the days of their first love: "by the broomy knowe, under the birken trees;" and perhaps his thoughts were there, even in that supreme hour. No other word, except a broken ejaculation of prayer, came from him; only the by-standers "saw a great change"—the change there is no describing—come over his brow. The anguish of mortal pain seemed to melt into peace. A great sigh escaped him, such as bursts from the bosom in some sudden relief from suffering, and the handsome man was a handsome corpse. He who had been so much to that wailing woman, had become

IT! "it;" "the body;" that perishable form which had clothed the eternal soul, and was now to be carried away and hidden under the earth, "to suffer corruption," and join the unseen throng of those whose place in this world "shall know them no more."

The loud sound of her tempestuous wailing seemed to float out and follow Sir Douglas, as he at length left the house, and recrossed the dreadful bridge which had been the scene of that tragedy. The dead horse, whose neck had been broken in the leap, was still lying there; the waters gurgling round the new obstacle, and waving the glossy mane to and fro, like a row of reeds. The dreary rain was still drifting with the wind against the soaked stems of the fir-trees; and the scarlet berries and yellowing leaves of the mountain ash, or rowan-tree, tossed and swung above the torrent, far over head; dropping now and then a bead of red like a blood-gout into the whirling waters that swept them away. Even so were swept away all the hopes, plans, and resolutions made only the night previous in behalf of his brother, by Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie. And as the sobbing storm died down on wood and mountain, and one pale crimson and melancholy streak gleamed light from a sunset that promised a better day, even so did the gleaming hope of being of use to little Kenneth (so like the Kenneth his earliest boyish recollections brought back to him!) break through the miserable gloom in his kindly mind.

On arriving at the castle he described the scenes he had witnessed, and the death that had so unexpectedly taken place, to Lady Ross. She heard it, as she had heard of the death of her husband, with frigid composure. Her daughter also seemed unmoved; except by a certain amount of surprise, and the curiosity of one who listens to the account of a strange event.

But when Sir Douglas, endeavouring to repress the evidence how much he himself was moved, wound up his narration by endeavouring to enlist what pity there might be in Lady Ross's heart for the orphan and his wretched parent, then indeed a slight change was visible in Lady Ross's countenance. The indifference that had reigned there was replaced by a look of supercilious scorn; and, when Sir Douglas imprudently faltered—"Being yourself a mother, I thought perhaps—" she flashed that look of scorn full upon him, with the speech, "I beg to remind you, Sir Douglas, that I am *not* the mother of children legitimized on a death-bed. Nor am I a miller's daughter; which, I understand, was the social position

of Meg Carmichael. I was not ignorant of the indecent infatuation of your brother for that low-born and low-bred woman; and the last thing I should have expected from *you*, on coming into the estates, was the admission of such base claims on the part of persons who have no more real right to Torrieburn than your father's head-keeper, and are about as fit to set up there as lairds of the place."

CHAPTER III.

CLAY IDOLS.

IN spite of the opinion thus enunciated by the widow of his misguided father, Sir Douglas took up the trust his brother left him in all the simplicity of good faith. Little Kenneth was acknowledged and installed as "Kenneth Carmichael Ross of Torrieburn," and a tutor appointed to teach and care for him as the young laird. Fain would Sir Douglas have removed him from his mother, and from all the early associations of the place; but the same ungovernable spirit, which had struck him with so much amazement at the time of poor Kenneth's death, was displayed in all her dealings with others. Her grief was despair: it was followed by a nervous fever: the fever by a disturbed state of nerves bordering on insanity. And then she recovered, like a creature that has moaned for its whelps and gradually forgotten them.

No sooner had she lifted from the pressure of that woe, than a wilfulness exceeding all poor Kenneth had ever shown, took its place. She considered herself, under that declaration of marriage, as the natural occupier and possessor of Torrieburn House till her son should be grown up. She established her mother there, as indeed might have been expected; her father, the old miller of Torrieburn, coming frequently over—sometimes to complain of the inconvenience of his wife's residence apart from him, sometimes to quarrel both with her and her daughter, sometimes to carouse with companions for whom she could scarcely refuse to provide whiskey in a limited or unlimited quantity. With the first tutor, appointed to the care of her son, she entered into relations so unseemly, after the subsiding of her grief, that, the fact coming to the ears of Sir Douglas, he wrote her a letter of remonstrance; and substituted a somewhat stern but very sensible pedagogue in his stead, with whom she incessantly quarrelled, and from whose authority she encouraged her

boy to appeal. Sir Douglas was always receiving letters from the boy or his mother complaining of severity, complaining of injustice; till, at length, wearied out by petitions and objurgations, a fresh substitution was made, and a tutor sent of good education, with excellent recommendations, and private instructions to "show as much indulgence as was consistent with good discipline." This time Meg Carmichael made further changes impossible by marrying the tutor: and the ill-assorted household continued on the most comfortless footing,—the wayward, handsome woman alternately quarrelling with her husband, and giving herself airs as "Mrs Ross of Torrieburn,"—or bestowing on him some of the wild adoration which had formerly been the portion of poor Kenneth: and the tutor-husband vainly trying to make head, in the house that was scarcely to be called his own, against the drunken old miller and his boon companions, the bustling and shrewish old woman his wife, and the disposition to shirk all control and all guidance in the lovely little boy whose position, as the future "laird," was acknowledged, in different forms of folly and flattery, by all around him in the narrow circle of home. A hint from Sir Douglas that it would soon be time to send him to a good school was received with such a storm of indignation and despair, such ill-spelt, ill-worded letters of passionate remonstrance, that Sir Douglas put off all further alteration in young Kenneth's destiny till he could get home from his command, and personally superintend the necessary changes. That the boy was well taught by his tutor-father was evidenced by the letters he wrote; and which, though they half-nettled, half-amused Sir Douglas by their tone of presumption, addressing him entirely "*déjà en égal*," were such as no boy of inferior education or inferior intelligence could possibly have penned.

At length the day came when Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie returned as a resident to the home of his fathers! His stepmother had been dead some time; but her daughter had, by his own express wish, continued to reside in the castle; nor had he the heart, when he found that lonely young spinster there, to enter on the topic of her removal. It would be time enough, Sir Douglas thought, when he was married, if ever he married. Her mother had been odious, but that was not the daughter's fault; and there was nothing offensive in her, personally. On the contrary, she appeared especially anxious to preserve the home she had acquired, by the most absolute acquiescence in

her half-brother's wishes, and a disposition to see to all those minor arrangements of a household which a man cannot see to himself, and which that astute and reserved little personage performed as well as any hired housekeeper, if not better.

When Sir Douglas first beheld the boy for whom, unseen, he had been caring, and whose future he was so anxiously about to arrange, soldier though he was, he burst into tears. Kenneth stood before him! Kenneth in the days before they were parted—Kenneth when they used to climb the hills with their arms round each other's necks—Kenneth before the cold cloud of difference mistily rose between them. And, though Sir Douglas kept to his resolution, and sent the lad both to school and college,—undeterred by the loud wailing of Mrs. Maggie Ross, who ran along the edge of the high road weeping and waving her handkerchief at the mail-coach the first day he departed, and who constantly made his recurring holidays terms of the most corrupting influence of folly and over-indulgence,—yet the depths of love he felt for that orphan lad were such as rarely exist even in a father's heart for a favourite child. It was a passion with Sir Douglas. What Kenneth did, what Kenneth said, what Kenneth thought, was the principal occupation of his own more mature mind. Inwardly he vowed never to marry: to bring the boy up as his heir: to make his home not at Torrieburn but Glenrossie, and suffer this living image of his dead brother to "come after him," when he, too, should be dead and gone.

As time rolled on, however, much anxiety was mingled with Sir Douglas's love. The wayward son of that wayward race seemed turning out yet more wayward and rebellious than all that had preceded him. Drunkenness, a love of low company, of being what is vulgarly termed "cock of the walk," the most profuse extravagance as to money matters, and a sort of careless defiance of all authority, more especially the constituted authority of his stately uncle, whom at this time he and all around him took to calling by the title I have already commented upon, "Old Sir Douglas,"—all these defects, and more, showed themselves in Kenneth's son. And all these defects did Sir Douglas believe he could, by care and resolution, weed out of that hot young head and heart, as the gardener weeded the broad walks in the long-forsaken gardens of Glenrossie. Twice had he paid the debts of the young collegian, and received, in answer to his imploring lec-

tures, the most satisfactory promises for the future. A third time he called upon his uncle to clear him, and this time Sir Douglas thought fit, greatly to the young man's discontent, to consider his college career as closed, and send him to travel. Fain would he have made the lad his own companion, but there was so much chance of ill-will and hot blood in the attempts at control over his actions that he dreaded to undertake it, lest it should make a "break" between them.

With the most liberal allowance it was possible to grant, and the most intelligent companion he could find, — little over Kenneth's own age, and full of good and amiable qualities, — Sir Douglas despatched his nephew on what in old-fashioned days was called "the grand tour;" and, with a pang at his affectionate heart, stood on the steps at the castle entrance, and saw that handsome careless head smile a final farewell from the chaise window, and waited till the sound of wheels died away in the distance, and lifted his cap, with a half-murmured prayer, before he turned back into the great hall.

There, everything looked as it did in his own boyhood and adolescence; as when he ran away from home; when he was sent to school; when he returned in eager gladness to be pressed in Kenneth's arms; when he tried to persuade his father to give Kenneth some profession; when he looked out into the stormy night, and saw that brother ride away for the last time; and all these scenes chased each other through his musing mind — all terminating in the one leading thought, What would be the future of Kenneth's son?

The accounts sent from time to time were far from reassuring. Young Kenneth acknowledged no power of control in the student-companion allotted for his tour, but treated him as a sort of confidential courier, bound to take all trouble off his hands, provide for his amusements, and carefully minister to his comforts, but nothing more. The one vice, too, from which Kenneth had hitherto been guarded, that of immorality, — which his mother, remembering her own destiny, watched over with a jealous care she bestowed on nothing else, — seemed rapidly to be taking rank among the young laird's already established errors; and at length Sir Douglas received one morning, by the early post at Glenrossie, a very long, very tender, very comfortless letter from the friend of Eton days, Lorimer Boyd, then at the English Legation at Naples, informing him that young Kenneth, whose

acquaintance he had made with the most eager interest for Sir Douglas's sake, was becoming a noted character among the English visitors, with anything but credit to himself and family; that the young man who had been engaged to accompany him desired to resign his trust into Sir Douglas's hands, feeling it to be positively dishonest to continue receiving a high salary, as travelling tutor, for the supposed performance of duties which the disposition of Kenneth Ross rendered it impossible to fulfil. Finally, that he thought Sir Douglas could not do better than come himself to Italy, where Lorimer Boyd would be overjoyed to see him, and where new arrangements might, he hoped, be made; ending with the ominous words, "for, if something is not done, and that speedily, I should fear that this young lad, to whom you have shown such generous kindness, will turn out utterly worthless."

The next day saw Sir Douglas Ross on his way to London, to procure his passport and proceed to his destination. He reached it without event; and, in the satisfaction evinced by Lorimer Boyd, and the pleasant converse of that old friend, half forgot the pain of observing that his unexpected coming had produced in young Kenneth no other evidence of emotion than a sort of discontented surprise.

"Well, well," thought the uncle, indulgently, "he probably knows he has been complained of, and I must make allowance for that."

In the evening, fidgeting a little over the long colloquy after their late dinner, at which Lorimer Boyd was the sole guest, Kenneth said, "I am now going out; going to a party, — a very decent family party," added he, with a half saucy, half angry smile. "Will you come too, Uncle Douglas? I know Mr. Lorimer Boyd is dying to get there, instead of talking any more to you, for there is to be amateur music, and some of his particular friends are to sing."

Something of gloom and displeasure overshadowed Lorimer Boyd's countenance, and apparently, in spite of assumed carelessness, the young man felt it, for he added hastily, "I believe he's as fond of music as you are, Uncle, and that is saying a good deal."

"My dear boy, I'll go wherever you are both going; we can all go together; if Lorimer will undertake to introduce me, I shall be charmed to plunge at once into the dissipations of Naples."

Lorimer started out of some sort of rev-

erie in which he had been absorbed; and, with half a sigh and half a laugh, he said, "I fear you won't find much to charm you in the set that are at present in Naples; but this is a pleasant enough house, and certainly the music is divine."

Lorimer Boyd made his introduction with a degree of shyness, which no experience of the world had conquered in him; but stately Sir Douglas was greeted with great eagerness as a new-comer amongst the little society; nor were there wanting looks of surprised admiration and whispers of inquiry, as the handsome soldier made his way through the busy crowd to a place near the piano. For it was true that Sir Douglas was very fond of music; and the one faint recollection he retained of his mother was the shape of her lovely mouth and the soft darkness of her eyes, singing some snatch of an old ballad of unhappy love:—

"He turned him round and right about
All on that foreign shore;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With 'Adieu for evermore, my dear,
With adieu for evermore!'"

Nothing is so capricious as memory. Why one incident is remembered and all others forgotten—why a person with whom we have lived in intimacy for years is recalled always by one, or, at the most, by two or three different aspects,—on occasions neither more nor less important than a thousand others,—are mysteries of the working of the brain, where these memories are packed away, which the profoundest of our philosophers have been, and are, unable to solve. But certain it is that among other caprices of memory Sir Douglas, who had lost his mother in his childhood, remembered her chiefly by her songs; and above all by that versified farewell which could have conveyed no idea to a child's mind beyond the vague sadness of intonation. Whenever he thought of his mother, he heard that stanza float upon the air. He was thinking of her now, in the midst of that assembly of strangers, with no other mainspring to those thoughts than the sudden touch given by his nephew's remark that he was fond of music.

His thoughts wandered, too, to a beautiful German fable as to the effect of certain singing—one of their wild stories of water-spirits; in which the hero, impatient at the old ferryman not being in attendance to punt him across a river, swears a good deal; is stopped by a young girl who says she is the ferryman's daughter, and offers

to punt him over in her father's absence: accepts the offer, but is greatly troubled in his mind by the fact that the reeds keep bowing wherever the boat passes, though there is not a breath of wind; and that, as the young girl herself bends to the water, her face is reflected there, not as she actually appears, but with a wreath of lilies round her head. He comprehends immediately (as people do, in dreams and in German ballads), that she is something supernatural,—and spends the remainder of his shortened and grieving days in perpetually paddling in and out among the reeds; calling for her, looking for her, pining for her. because, as the poet writes it, he has been bewitched "by that little red mouth so full of songs!"

Sir Douglas was roused from his fanciful musing by a real song; and, by some strange coincidence, a German song. A young lady had sat down to the piano. His nephew was standing by her, waiting to turn the leaf when the verse should be completed. She shook her head gently, and said, in a low voice, "I know them all by heart." Then came the rich melody of one of those soft contralto voices the very sound of which gives the sensation of a caress to the listener; a little trembling too,—not the trembling of shyness, but that peculiar *tremolo* natural to some voices, and which rather adds to, than takes away from their power.

A German song; a German "Good-night;" something ineffably coaxing, soothing, and peaceful in its harmonious notes. Involuntarily Sir Douglas sighed; he felt a strange contrast between the anxiety that had prompted his hurried journey,—the storms of his past life,—and his present feverish fatigue and worry,—with that delicious lullaby! The girl who was singing glanced towards him, with soft hard eyes that seemed made to match her voice. Then she asked something in an undertone of young Kenneth, and the reply was distinctly heard, "It is my Uncle Douglas."

The young lady's reply was also audible in the silence that followed her song. She said, in a tone of great surprise, "That, Sir Douglas? that Sir Douglas Ross?"

"Yes," said Kenneth testily, "why not?" "Oh! I don't know," said the girl, laughing shyly; "only it is not at all my idea of him. I never should have guessed that to be him, from your way of talking. I expected—"

"Expected what?"

"I don't know; but I should never have guessed that to be 'Old Sir Douglas.'"

As she spoke the last words, she again looked up at the newly-arrived stranger. Sir Douglas's eyes were fixed upon her. It was but too evident he had overheard what she had said. Both felt embarrassed as their glances met. Sir Douglas coloured to the temples; and the young lady blushed.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE pleasant evening was followed by a painful morning. Sir Douglas ascertained from Lorimer Boyd that, with the one exception of Lady Charlotte Skifton's (where that evening had been passed), Kenneth Ross had scarcely footing in one respectable house in Naples. His nights were spent at the theatre, the gaming table, and in wild orgies with the idlest of an idle Neapolitan aristocracy; and his days in recovering from the debauch of the night. Sums perfectly fabulous, considering his position and the amount of his very moderate fortune, were owing in all directions;—and thrice, but for the painstaking interference and discretion of Lorimer Boyd,—the result of quarrels on the most trivial, or the most scandalous grounds, would have been a meeting with adversaries not very nice in their code of honour, and infinitely better accustomed to the use of pistols. To all remonstrance about his gambling or other debts he had constantly affirmed that it would be "all right"; that "Old Sir Douglas" would pay them; and, with a spirit of exaggeration partly wilful, and partly arising from ignorance of all things in his uncle's affairs, except the extreme readiness to assist him which had been always displayed, he represented himself as nephew to a millionaire; and was looked upon in the indolent and profligate circles he frequented as related to a sort of Scotch prince, whose coffers overflowed with gold, for which he had no better use than the pampering of his brother's son, the idol of his bachelor life, and his eventual heir.

Half melancholy and half provoked, Sir Douglas left his hotel for the lodging taken by his graceless favourite in one of the palazzos on the Chiaja. In the anteroom he found an Italian valet smoking one of his master's cigars as he leaned carelessly from the window overlooking the Giardin Reale, with no other occupation, apparently, than that of watching the swarming crowd, whose ceaseless shouting and chattering form so strange a contrast to our

own more silent and business-like population. The valet was extremely reluctant to admit Sir Douglas. "*Sua Eccellenza*,"—as he termed Kenneth,—had gone to a masked ball after the masquerade *soirée* at Lady Charlotte's, had only returned at daylight, and was not yet awake. But on receiving the explanations that the parties were related, and that he beheld before him that millionaire Milord of Scotland, of whose unexpected arrival even he had been told as of an important if not satisfactory event, he became as obsequious as he had been recalcitrant, begging his Excellency to walk into the other Excellency's apartment, when he would speedily wake the sleeping Excellency, and inform him of the illustrious Excellency's visit.

Sir Douglas got rid of the bowing valet, forbidding him to disturb his master. As he passed through Kenneth's bedroom, he paused and stood a few moments, with folded arms, leaning against the silk hangings and embroidered mosquito curtains of the luxurious bed, contemplating the sleeper. It was nearly noon, but the dim shadowy light from the Venetian blinds, broken by narrow streaks of sunshine that seemed to quiver and ripple on the floor, as if reflected from the dazzling bay below, could not disturb his slumbers. The wonderful likeness of Kenneth to his father, in that soft dreamy light, melted away the displeasure in Sir Douglas's heart. What to do with him, how to set matters right for him, and, how to reform him, was his sole thought. "He is yet but young," sighed the uncle, as he passed into the sitting-room, where the open windows admitted at once the brilliant glow of a southern sun, and as much fresh air as Naples can boast in these quarters on the Chiaja. Little enough; since all along that coast-built street lingers a compound odour of stale fruit, church incense, tar and fishing-nets, reeking beasts of burden, and the cheese and garlic of poverty-stricken and dirty lazzaroni. In the principal sitting-room everything was in the same style of confused luxury as in the bedroom. Parisian fauteuils and sofas in handsome chintz covers, hired in to assist the indolence of the occupant, formed a strange contrast, and looked, as it were, doubly negligent, by the side of the faded splendour of the tight and upright satin chairs and banquettes which formed the original furniture of the Palazzo; which furniture was indeed but sparsely supplied; the real owner making an arrangement very common in Italy—namely, letting the under and upper apartments, and inhabiting the

principal floor himself. A quantity of little paper volumes of French romances, and a guitar, half-buried in sheets of music — some of it new, and some tattered and soiled and scribbled over — were the only symptoms of occupation, if we except two or three handsome pipes and an open box of cigars. "He is yet but young;" and "Did I do right in sending him abroad?" was doubtfully repeated in the mind of the perplexed uncle: not without a sorrowful consciousness that his own youth, and his own residence in various foreign countries, had been very differently spent, though he had had no friend or counsellor to guide and overlook him.

Absorbed in these reflections — looking out on the bright bay without seeing it, and scarcely conscious even of the shrill sound of multitudinous voices and ceaseless roll of vehicles in the streets below — it was not till young Kenneth laid a hand on his shoulder and greeted him with a sort of tired good-morrow, that Sir Douglas was even aware of his presence. Then the imprudent uncle plunged at once into all he had been ruminating over; all he had to say to the erring nephew. Warmly and rapidly he spoke of Kenneth's extravagance, his drunkenness, his idleness, his debts; of the absolute necessity of his instantly selecting a profession, whether army, navy, law, or diplomacy; of the journey to Naples having been made in fear and trouble solely on his account (with a frank admission that Lorimer Boyd's friendly report had brought about that journey); of the determination Sir Douglas had come to, to tighten the reins, and so prevent the self-indulgent ruin of the young man who stood before him!

A man who rises after a late ball, and is thus suddenly set upon before he has even breakfasted, is not likely to be very patient; nor did either of the interlocutors come of a patient race. Kenneth's answers were full of that blind and boundless ingratitude which belongs to early youth. He refused to recognize in anything that had been done for him anything for which he had to be grateful; he utterly defied all authority; he could not see how Sir Douglas could assume to exercise any. He (Kenneth) was Ross of Torrieburn, and Sir Douglas was Ross of Glenrossie, — a richer man, that was all. Lorimer Boyd was an intolerable prig, and a meddlesome, treacherous idiot; and he (Kenneth) well knew to what cause he might attribute his uncalled-for interference.

He had little doubt (unless Sir Douglas had greatly mismanaged during his long minority), that his debts could be paid with

the greatest ease; as to a profession, his father had no profession, and he himself desired nothing of the kind. He loved every inch of Torrieburn too well to go about the world like the Wandering Jew, as he considered Sir Douglas had done all his life, for no earthly reason. He had never asked, or wished, to come abroad, — but since he had come (by Sir Douglas's desire), he was determined to enjoy himself, and no earthly power should prevent him from doing so. As to the accusation of drunkenness, it was not true; and if he did occasionally get drunk, so did all the men he had ever known, either at college or since; and as to other temptations, he had infinitely greater temptations than other people, being handsomer, quicker-witted, and more fitted for social enjoyment than ninety-nine men in a hundred; so that though it was all very well for commonplace fellows to be tied down to commonplace rules, it wouldn't do for *him*, and he thought his uncle mad to expect it! Finally, with a saucy toss of his handsome young head, and a look of defiance at land and sea, as he turned from the open window and dropped into one of the lounging arm-chairs preparatory to beginning his late breakfast, he advised Old Sir Douglas not to get into "that humbugging way of lecturing" that comes upon men in later life, but to remember the days when he himself was young; when, doubtless, he indulged to the full in all that early harvest of fleeting pleasures of which he was now seeking to deprive his ill-used nephew.

Sir Douglas almost prefaced with an impatient groan the burst of passionate reply with which he met this tirade. "In the first place," he said, "if I had made debts my father would not have cleared them, even had they been reckoned by hundreds instead of thousands, as I fear yours will be. In the next place, I had a profession in which, — whatever may be *your* opinion of its opportunities for pleasure — strict discipline, and the conduct of a gentleman, are imperative even in time of peace; and I am thankful to say that of those leisure times I saw but little."

A proud, evanescent flush passed over the fine frank face, as he spoke; and then he continued eagerly and sadly:

"Oh! my dear Kenneth do think there is something more to be done with life than merely to enjoy it! And, for God's sake, don't take the tone you have just taken with me, of that morbid selfish individuality that supposes its own temptations or advantages greater than those of other people! Take your place freely and frankly amongst them

without expecting too much, or thinking too highly of yourself, or offending by assumptions that they won't recognize, and which only lead to quarrels. Depend upon it, there is no such thing upon earth as a man so intensely superior to his fellow-men, that he should stand exempted from common rules of conduct. God does not permit such gaps of distance among His creatures. He gives to all, something; and He gives to *none* the sort of superiority you would claim. 'That faultless monster which the world ne'er saw,' is a line from a true poet and philosopher. I know but one thing, Kenneth, in which you excel other men, and that is, that you are handsomer than most men; but how far will that one advantage go, in this world?"

"Well, a good way," muttered the youth, with a sulky smile, as he broke the shell of a second egg; "ask your wise friend Lorimer Boyd else."

"My friend Lorimer Boyd may overvalue an advantage he has not, as you overvalue the advantages you have. Nevertheless, he might please where you would not; and most assuredly in the great race of life he would win where you would not. Whether you adopt, or refuse to adopt, a profession, you must (unless you retire to a hermitage) mingle with your fellow-men. To be admired, is an accident; but to be beloved is in every one's power. You *must*, if you mean to be socially welcome, keep some prudence and decency in view; you must be patient and respectful to some men, cordial and even-tempered with others; and, above all, you must accept, in lieu of such foolish self-assertion as broke from you but now, the position which most certainly at times will be yours — namely, the finding yourself less gifted, less well-informed, less worthy, and less esteemed, than some you consort

with. I say *must*, because it is utterly impossible that any man should *always* be the first, foremost, and best, of every given group of men in which he finds himself for the time being.

"And now, my dear boy, cease to pelt that plate with grape-skins, as though it were the author of my unwelcome lecture; and put on your hat, and do the honours of this lovely city to me; for, in spite of all my wanderings, I have never been here. And get me a list of your liabilities, that we may see what should be done. Torrieburn is not California, and even my willingness to aid you does not extend so far as to be willing to transfer the rents of my estate into the pockets of foreign gamblers. Tell me, too, something of your friends and friendships, here; since I am not entirely to rely on that honest arch-traitor my old schoolmate Lorimer Boyd. Tell me about the people we were with last night; on whom, indeed, we ought, or rather I ought, to go and leave a card this morning. And get back your smiles, Kenneth, as we walk along; for that is too clouded a brow for so clear a morning!"

The anxious heart hiding its anxiety under this assumed gayety, touched the wayward young man more than the previous lecture. Kenneth wrung his uncle's hand with some confused expressions of mingled regret and deprecation; and he smiled, too (not a very comfortable or satisfactory smile), as they reached the arches of the villa at Santa Lucia, where Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter resided; murmuring to himself *sotto voce*, as he looked up at the green jealousies that shut out the sultry day in those familiar windows, "Here, at least, I think I have the advantage over wise Mr. Lorimer Boyd." And with this ejaculation he followed Sir Douglas into the house.

CHAPTER V.

FEMININE CHARACTER.

SIR DOUGLAS ROSS was considerably startled when, on the drawing-room door being opened, in lieu of receiving the usual commonplace and easy welcome accorded to morning visitors, he beheld Lady Charlotte sobbing bitterly in the depths of a very comfortable French *causeuse*, in which she was rather lying than sitting when the two gentlemen arrived. She lifted her embroidered handkerchief from her eyes for an instant, as if disturbed by their entrance, and then recommenced her weeping. The soft-eyed girl, who had sung the German "Good-night" the previous evening, was standing by her chair, with an expression of mingled perplexity and sympathy: she murmured, "Dear mamma, here are friends," in an expostulating tone, put out one hand shyly to greet Kenneth, leaning with the other on the back of her mother's chair, and repeated the words, "Here are friends."

"Z zine! Zizine! Zizine!" sobbed Lady Charlotte.

"Mamma, Zizine will do very well; you will see she will do very well; I will attend to her myself."

"How can you talk such nonsense, my dear Gertrude? I am sure she will die! Zizine! my poor little Zizine!"

Puzzled beyond measure, and wondering whether a little sister, grandchild, or favourite niece was the subject of lamenting, Sir Douglas made rather a stiff bow, and said hurriedly, "We have come at a most unfortunate moment; I hope there is no serious cause of anxiety; we will call again later in the day."

"Oh no, no; oh no, no; don't go away; don't leave me; I am sure Mr. Ross would not think of leaving me at such a time! He is always so friendly. Pray don't go—pray don't; it makes me worse, the idea of your going! It makes me worse!"

"Mamma will be better presently," added the daughter, in a low, vexed voice; and she glanced from Kenneth, who was biting his lip to repress the dawn of one of his insolent smiles, and looked appealingly in the graver face of his uncle.

"Can we do anything?" asked the latter, kindly.

"Oh, no! pray sit down. I will endeavour to be more composed—pray don't go—no one can do anything; it is most afflicting; but don't go. The fact is, Antonio has been so tormented by my English servants (and I am sure I would send every

one of them away sooner than Zizine should suffer),—that he utterly refuses to stay with me. I offered him double what he engaged for as courier, but he won't! He said (it was so cruel of him! he said)—and here a renewed burst of sobbing interrupted the explanation—"that—that it was ridiculous to expect him to stay for the sake of a *piccola bestia*" (that was what he called Zizine), when he was made quite *triste*, day and night, by the enmity of my servants. Now, you know, they have no enmity at all to him; only they don't like him; and if he had any generosity he wouldn't consider his own feelings in the matter, but mine: think what a goose he must be to go and fret in that way about nothing! And Zizine will die; I know she will die!"

"Who is Zizine?" exclaimed Sir Douglas at last, with a little impatience in his voice.

He was answered by the soft-eyed girl, grave, embarrassed, hesitating, with downcast lids. "Zizine—Zizine—is a little Brazilian monkey, of which mamma is very fond."

There was a moment's pause; and then she added, "We are all fond of mamma's pet. Mr. Ross knows Zizine."

And with the last words, trifling as they seemed, the melodious voice seemed to grow severe, and the eyes that had been so timid turned so full and pained a look of reproach at Kenneth, that Sir Douglas was positively startled.

Not so Kenneth, whose repressed smile broke into a little mocking laugh. "Yes, I do know Zizine; and I will introduce her to my uncle, or, to speak more respectfully, I will introduce my uncle to her; and if she does not snap his fingers off, he shall feed and caress her, and console her for Antonio's obduracy."

"Oh, Mr. Ross," whimpered Lady Charlotte, "how can you make a jest of anything so distressing. I am sure if your good uncle knew all! You are not aware, Sir Douglas, that this little creature—this precious little creature—will not eat unless fed by Antonio! It will not take food from any other hand; and what is to be done, if Antonio persists in leaving me, I am sure I don't know! I have been wretched about it all the morning!"

The shower of ~~easy~~ tears, after this last burst, seemed to clear off a little; and the possessor of Zizine listened with a ray (or a rainbow) of hope to Sir Douglas's assurances that a hungry monkey would take food from the most alien hand, sooner than

go without it; and even ventured to hint that the valued Antonio himself must originally have been a stranger to Zizine, since she was brought from the Brazils; a remark which seemed to make a profound impression on Lady Charlotte, who pronounced it to be "so true; so very true — and — and so very comforting;" and she was quite surprised it had never occurred to her before. "But you know, Sir Douglas — Columbus's egg — you know!" And on seeing rather a puzzled acquiescence in her new friend's face, she further explained herself by adding, "what nobody thought of till they saw it done, you know!" and with a tearful smile she gave a final flourish of the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, and settled herself for more cheerful discourse. Then she listened with rapt attention to a number of little anecdotes told by Sir Douglas, of instinct and wisdom in animals, such as would be narrated to an intelligent child; and when he wound up with the tragic incident of the suicide from grief, of a male marmoset whose little mate dying on shipboard, was thrown overboard; and told how, the very first day his cage was left accidentally open, the melancholy little survivor leaped over the ship's side at that identical spot, into the waves; and described the regret of all the sailors, who were of opinion that the ship should have been put about, though in wild weather, rather than that Jocko should have been allowed to perish, — Lady Charlotte vehemently exclaimed, "Oh! I think so too — I think so too! — How very cruel of the captain!" And as she and her guests stepped forth into the garden, and paced along the terrace, and through the Pergola shaded with vines, she remarked to Kenneth that she had never seen a more pleasant or gentlemanly man than his uncle — "and so travelled, too" — which phrase she explained, like Columbus's egg, and said she meant that he knew so many things, which, of course, he had picked up going so much about the world as she understood he had done.

And Gertrude too praised Sir Douglas, even to himself! She was leaning against one of the square stone supports of the loggia, the vine leaves with their tendrils dropping and curling round her uncovered head, pausing to let her companion admire the distant view of land and sea. "It was very kind of you," she said, "to amuse mamma; it took away all her nervousness."

Sir Douglas flushed a little. It was very pleasant being spoken to in such a friendly way by this pretty girl; and he was rather

shy, though his shyness was not awkward like his friend Lorimer Boyd's.

"I was glad to amuse her. But you must not be angry with Kenneth for laughing a little: I had no idea it was a monkey that Lady Charlotte was so anxious about when I first saw her distress."

Gertrude shrank a little farther from her companion, and spoke in a low voice.

"I know; I was not exactly angry; but it vexed me. Mamma is not — that is, I mean, she is not one of those clever women with strong nerves, who do nothing that any one can smile at. I know mamma is not clever; but she is good and tender; she is tender to all she loves; and she is tender to all creatures — birds, and pets of all kinds. My poor father used to give them to her; he died of consumption, and he used to have them in his room; it is true he did not give her Zizine, but mamma has the habit of loving these things extremely — and — and I cannot bear that any one should seem almost to jest at her vexation."

She trembled a little as she spoke; but that trembling — like the tremolo in her clear rich singing — gave no impression of weakness; and the touch of sternness was in her voice again at the final phrase, as it had been when she said that Kenneth "knew Zizine." Sir Douglas liked her for it. He liked the protection given by her own child to this sacred silly woman: sacred as a parent, even where weakness could not but be perceptible; sacred for the sake of duty and for the sake of scenes replete with sadness and reverent associations: — not to be laughed at by mocking lips; to be pitied, to be tenderly dealt with, even as she dealt, or was supposed to deal, with others. He felt that had he been the son of a silly mother he also would have dealt so by her; and his own mother's half-remembered, half-forgotten face, vaguely rose again to memory in presence of this girl, as it had done the evening before — leaving the impression, as it did then, that Gertrude Skifton "had a look of her about the eyes." Dear eyes, that bent over his cradle, and were lifted to Heaven when he first learned to pray, and shone for a little way on in his childhood, and then vanished, leaving in those childish years such a comfortless blank of love.

When he left the Villa Mandorlo with Kenneth, they walked a little way in silence; then Kenneth said, laughing, "Well, we had a fine scene there! That woman is an incarnation of folly, but the girl is very nice."

"Yes, the girl is very nice," assented Sir Douglas.

"I'm glad you like her," said Kenneth, carelessly; "for they are the only people (of your sort) I care to see here; and your friend, Lorimer Boyd, is in and out of their house like a tame dog. When he ain't in the Chancellerie you may look for him in the Villa Mandorlo. I believe he means to take Lady Charlotte in hand, according to the advertisements, 'To ladies of neglected education.' He comes in like a tutor, with plans of Herculaneum, and drawings of Pompeian pottery, and tickets to see this, that, and the other, with most desperate industry."

"And does Lady Charlotte respond?"

"Well, not unless some magnates are to accompany her. Her whole soul (if she has a soul) seems to be occupied with the ambition of being always in a certain 'set,' wherever she goes. She is always triumphing in being invited, or lamenting that she and her daughter are 'left out,' or setting some little wheel in motion to 'get asked,' somewhere. I believe she tolerates Lorimer Boyd (to whom she always listens with a stifled yawn), only as the well-spring and fountain of introductions she would not otherwise obtain in this place. She dines constantly at the English Legation, and goes to balls at the Neapolitan Court, and knows all the Principesses, Duchesses, Contesses, and Contessinas that rattle their carriages up and down the Chiaja; and if the whole government were subverted (as it certainly will be one of these days), it is my belief that she would transfer her allegiance and her visiting cards to whatever potentates floated on the surface, and to whatever dynasty happened to reign."

"Well, it is an odd mania in a woman holding a certain and established rank herself in her own country; but when you know more of the world, Kenneth, you won't think it so very uncommon. Are they rich?"

"Yes, I think they are. I believe" (and here Kenneth hesitated a little)—"I believe the daughter has an independent fortune; and her mother is bent on marrying her to some foreign grandee. She very nearly managed it with one of the Roman Colonas, or some such great family, before they came here; but his family wouldn't hear of it, the young lady being a Protestant."

"I wonder Lady Charlotte would think of such a marriage!"

"Think of it! I assure you she clung to it as if she were drowning; and as to the religious part of the difficulty, she said she

really had hoped better things from the confessor of the family, who seemed such a *suave*, well-mannered, sociable man, than to oppose himself to her daughter; and she was sure, Gertrude would not object to listen 'occasionally' to his exhortations, or even to go, 'now and then, with her husband the prince,' to the great Church festival, 'but not as a customary thing; of course they could not expect that.' I really do think there never was such a goose born as that woman!"

If Sir Douglas thought his concealed nephew severe, he did not find his rational friend, Lorimer Boyd, a whit more indulgent with respect to his new associates. All the craving after fine acquaintance and frivolous gaieties, and all the insane planning about her daughter, was confirmed in his report. "And the worst of it is," concluded Lorimer, gloomily, "that she was once a great beauty."

Sir Douglas laughed. "How does that add to her offence?"

"By adding to her folly. She has all the *minauderies* and airs of a silly beautiful girl, being now but a silly elderly woman. I could box her ears when I see her dropping her faded pendulous cheek to her skeleton shoulder, with a long ringlet of heaven-knows-who's hair in the fashion of a love-lock trailing over her scragginess. She always reminds me of some figure in Holbein's 'Dance of Death.' A most preposterous woman."

"Her daughter seems very different, and very fond of her, Lorimer. There must be some good in her, depend upon it."

"I suppose there is some good in every one. Her daughter—well! we see what bright freshness of vegetation springs up in tropic dust; what flowers burst through the crevices of those hot, barren walls! Poor child! half her time is spent in endeavouring not to seem ashamed of her mother."

"No; she loves her mother," exclaimed Sir Douglas, eagerly.

"She must have a great deal of love to spare," said Lorimer Boyd, with something between a sigh and a sneer; "and, if it is so, it says much for the daughter, but nothing for the mother. Gertrude Skifton is like her father. I knew him: he died here. A man to love and to remember."

"Well, you must not dispute with my wise uncle," laughed Kenneth, "for he set up to know more of these people in two days than those who have sat, as we have, for two months, within hail of Lady Charlotte's one ringlet almost every evening."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ACQUAINTANCE RIPENS.

ALMOST every evening. It is astonishing how rapidly intimacy progresses in country houses, sea-side gatherings, and the small society of compatriots in a foreign town. If you know each other at all, it is almost impossible not to be what is called "intimate;" even though that degree of familiarity may lessen, or cease altogether, when the circumstances which produced it are altered, and when persons who were "great friends" at Rome, Naples, or Florence, choose to drop into being civil acquaintances, after they once more carelessly congregate with the herding swarms of London. Lady Charlotte and her daughter Gertrude were the chief stars at Naples of many a picnic party and ball. Not that Gertrude was a great beauty, or her mother a wise woman, as we have seen; but because they were among the few well-connected English then in Naples, and "the set," as Lady Charlotte called it, with the addition of what was best of the "foreign set," mingled and met nearly every day in pursuit of the same aim — pleasure. The English are said to hold aloof from each other abroad; and there is a humorous passage at the opening of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," where he represents himself as meeting with a gentleman-like and conversible person, of whose chance companionship he was about to avail himself, but, *finding he was a compatriot*, he retired to his own room. Whatever may have been the case in Sterne's time, it is certain that the disposition now is rather the reverse; and though we hear of ladies in India, and officers' wives in regiments on foreign service, "flouting" each other in their own small circle; and in colonial society of ladies whom "nobody in the colony visits;" and everywhere of the various little monkey-copyings of exclusiveness performed by the Zizines who give themselves airs abroad — "captains' ladies," and "majors' ladies," "colonels' ladies," and "governors' ladies," and "white ladies," who won't associate with "brown ladies;" and Creoles, and Mestizas, and all sorts of other distinctions unknown to the great European family — yet, in a general way, the English are a sociable nation; and, beyond a certain cautious shyness as to the "respectability" of new acquaintance, there is no reluctance to come together.

But Lady Charlotte was of Scotch extraction, and the Scotch are yet more

willing to "foregather," as it is called, provided it be with their "own folk." They are a scantier population than the English, with a scantier aristocracy and gentry. The tide of commercial success has not yet so flooded in among them (though it is fast advancing) as it has amongst the English, sweeping away old feudal memories and landmarks. They know all about each other's families and "forbears," down to the twentieth degree of cousinhood; and both rich and poor, high and low, genteel and ungenteel, set a value on rank and connection far beyond the value set upon it in England, and set a value on their own nationality, which is a feeling distinct and apart. "Come of gude Scotch bluid" is a far greater recommendation among them than "come of a good old county family" is, among the Southrons; and when that "gude stock" is also noble, the respect is unbounded. That

"Caledonia, stern and wild,"

which made so rough a nurse to poetic Burns, admits, as a *theory*, his noble line —

"A man's a man for a' that;"

but, as a matter of practice, it is certain that if her wayward gauger had been a lord — if he had been a duke — if he had even been a laird — "Burns of Burndyke" — she would not have delayed the opportunity to *fêter* his genius till it became a centenary festival.

Lady Charlotte was a Scotchwoman; and she was glad to meet Lorimer Boyd and friends "from the North." She had even sought to establish a cousinhood between herself and Lorimer on the strength of some intermarriage between the Clochnabens and her own family in very remote times. And, at all events, she held him bound and responsible for her destiny in Naples, for fit introductions, and pleasant days. He had been very kind, she said, when Mr. Skifton was dying; "read to him, and that sort of thing," and very sorry for her and her daughter. That was more than two years ago now; and the grief for Mr. Skifton had begun to be wiped off the china slate of his widow's memory. She had not been a bad wife to him. Always very gentle; always very attentive when he was particularly ill; very sorry when he died. She wept very much the first time she saw her daughter in mourning, and when she was trying on her own weeds. Indeed, "for a long time afterwards," as she im-

pressed upon Gertrude, "she could not bear the sight of black crape," it always "brought the tears into her eyes, let her meet it where she would." But she was now beginning to be very cheerful and comfortable again; and had none of that depth of nature which, she observed, caused "a mere nothing" suddenly to "overcome that dear girl by reminding her of her poor father."

She was anxious, too, about Gertrude. She wished her to marry early, and marry well; and she was all the more uneasy about invitations and opportunities on account of various past circumstances connected with the long weary illness and climate-seeking days that had removed her from general society and "seasons" in London, where she had once been so much admired. And then, after she was left a widow, Gertrude had a bad cough, and was supposed to be threatened with the same complaint as her father, and she was advised to pass a "couple more winters in Italy" to recruit her strength; and, beyond and besides all this, there was the patent fact that her marriage with Mr. Skifton had rather put her out of that "set" to which it was her great aim to belong. It had been a love-match; a love-match not repented of by either party, and extremely advantageous in point of fortune to Lady Charlotte who had none. But, then, who was Mr. Skifton? He had every merit a man could have; but he did not come of a "good old stock," or of any known family. He was handsome, rich, elegant in manner, and singularly accomplished; but the careless question elicited by the news of his decease and Lady Charlotte's consequent widowhood, of "By the by, who the deuce was Skifton?" produced only the vague reply, "Well, I really don't know; I believe he was a very good sort of fellow. His father was a merchant, or a broker, or something; and his daughter will have money."

A little soreness consequent on this position, and a wavering puzzled notion that such circumstances had weighed more with her recalcitrant foreign grandees than Gertrude's religion, troubled Lady Charlotte's mind; she had been rather humbled and annoyed at the escape from her very simple web of the young Colonna; and previous to Sir Douglas's arrival she had already been occupying herself with little fooleries and flatteries to Kenneth, who, *faute de mieux*, would, she thought, make a good husband for Gertie (in her view of a good husband), being well off himself and

heir to old Sir Douglas. Her efforts, however, being confined to what chaperons call "bringing the young people together," and the encouragement of much singing of Scotch ballads in alternation with more cultivated music, she did neither good nor harm; and that is more than can be said of the majority of match-making or match-hoping mothers.

Neither was she, in fact, very anxious about it; for, after all, either here or elsewhere, some great duke, prince, or count might suddenly fall in love with her daughter; and she might wish that instead of Mr. Ross, and it would be very embarrassing to have to "throw over" Kenneth, and not very ladylike.

So things were suffered to take pretty much their own course; and a very pleasant course it was for all parties. Lorimer Boyd was as friendly as possible, and Kenneth exceedingly attentive, though now and then he teased Lady Charlotte by little mockeries and *persiflage* which she only half understood and feebly rebutted; and Sir Douglas, "in his way" was charming too. Lady Charlotte took great pains to please him; and never felt uneasy with him as she did occasionally with her nephew. She had just prudence enough "in case it ever came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie," to avoid all allusion to her knowledge that the nephew was thought very rich. It would be very foolish to set his rich uncle against him, and *all* young men ran a little wild at his age and abroad. And she used to try a little feeble flattery with Sir Douglas — her head very much to one side, and her slender fingers twirling that long young ringlet which she had made sole inheritor of her own departed love-locks, and which kept Lorimer Boyd in a chronic state of dissatisfaction. Modulating her voice to a sort of singing whisper, like a canary-bird at sunset, she ventured little hints of admiration as to his looks; and how he must "have been" much handsomer than Kenneth; and she bantered him about his "dreadful bravery" and his probable relationship to the "Parliament Captain" the Ross of 1650, and talked of the taking of Montrose, and made Gertrude repeat a stanza that she "saw in an old book, but what book it was had gone out of her poor head," —

"Leslie for the kirk,
And Middleton for the king;
But deil a man can gie a knock
But Ross and Augustine!"

But it was when Brazilian Zizine fell ill ("like a fellow-creature," as Lady Charlotte expressed it) that Sir Douglas's favour rose to its climax! He actually gravely inspected Zizine; he brought remedies, and seemed to pity the little dumb beast; and he talked with Gertrude of its "plaintive captive eyes," while he fed it. And Lady Charlotte was overheard saying of him, in most unintelligible Italian to the Contessa Bufo, that "Avendo potuto essere uno generale, nondimeno aveva guarito Zizine!" on which the pretty Contessa, with a warm Southern smile, pronounced Sir Douglas to be "tanto amabile!" though she had not the remotest idea what meaning her friend wished to convey, or what the possibility of his becoming a general had to do with his feeding a monkey.

His tenderness, however, to Zizine was not all. He amused Lady Charlotte; who declared that talking to him was "like sitting with the Arabian Nights." "No, Mr. Kenneth need not laugh; for of course she did not mean that she could sit with the Arabian Nights,—or with any other stories; but he knew well enough that what she really meant was, that his uncle told them so many pleasant things." She had daily driven up and down the Chiaja till she was weary, and daily inspected what Gertrude called the "playthings" at their pretty villa: playthings of which all Italians are very fond. Strange slender bridges over artificial streamlets; garden traps that when trodden on send a sprinkling shower over the head of the startled visitor; grottoes, and guilt gazebos, and Chinese summer-houses and thatched rustic lodges. But she had not seen the graver sights of Naples, as a dowager who had more acquaintance with history or even with Murray's guide-books might have done: so that much novelty cropped and budded out of the old places, in consequence of being with the new companionable friend.

People see things under such different aspects! When Stendahl published his Rome, Naples, and Florence, in 1817," all hat he chose to describe in his opening pages—whether the better to mask subsequent expressions of political opinions, or from any other motive—was the eagerness with which he flew to the theatres, and that operas were performed at the various times he visited during his tour. His account of his first entrance into Milan is, that he immediately went to La Scala; and his description of Naples is confined to the fact, that San Carlo being shut, he rushed to the Fiorentini. He mentions that "two

playhouses have been discovered at Pompeii, and a third at Herculaneum;" and as to the beauties of Nature, he disposes of them in his diary thus:—"25 Fevrier. Je reviens de Pæstum. *Route pittoresque.*"

An English lady who had arrived by sea at Lisbon sent her coachman and lady's-maid to amuse themselves with the sights of the new foreign city. The coachman returned filled with melancholy contempt for the inferior "turnout" of the Portuguese nobility as to carriages and harness: the lady's-maid said she (like Stendahl) had been to the opera, and thought the ladies' necks were in general far too short (though they wore some fine necklaces), and that their inclination to *embonpoint* was very remarkable; figures, indeed, that she "would have no pleasure in dressing."

Sir Douglas's mode of seeing Naples might be no better than that of his neighbours, but it had the merit of entertaining Lady Charlotte Skifton. He was full of historical gossip; to which she used to listen most attentively, pulling the young ringlet nearly straight, and looking round as if she vaguely expected to see the people and events he conjured up. She "could not eat her dinner" for thinking of young Conradin—titular king of Sicily from the time he was two years old till he was sixteen,—and then, (at that boyish age!) led out to execution in the market-place with his uncle Frederic of Austria; Pope Urban having aided Charles of Anjou to defeat and take him prisoner. She implicitly believed the doubtful story of his mother sailing into the Bay of Naples with black sails to her ships, and untold treasure as ransom, too late to rescue her murdered and courageous boy. She was "afraid she was almost glad" at the increased hatred of the French which that execution inspired, till in the rolling course of years, at a certain Easter, 1282, every Frenchman in Sicily, except one, was murdered.

She thought Queen Joanna's conduct "really now so very abominable," twisting a silk cord of variegated colours, and answering her inquisitive husband that it was "to strangle him with," so playfully that he believed she was joking till the horrible threat came true. She was delighted to hear that Queen Joanna was herself smothered afterwards, after many more years of crime, and she looked at the dark, gaping windows of her ruined palace in the Bay, with awe and satisfaction.

As to Masaniello, and his rebellion and brief triumph—she said she "knew all about him"—except that the people had

sewed his head again to his body, and obliged the Government to give him a state burial after his downfall and massacre, — "because she had seen the opera of *Masaniello* several times: only in the opera there was nothing about what happened after he was killed."

Newer to her was the hanging of Admiral Caraccioli (that blot upon the fame of Nelson!), and the well-attested story of the body of the Italian admiral floating upright, to the consternation of the sailors, in the wake of Nelson's ship, from the imperfect weighing down of the corpse when flung into the sea.

Her interest as to the disputed fact whether Pozzuoli was the place where St. Paul landed, was weak to the absorbed attention with which she devoured the details of the murder of Agrippina by order of her own son, the Emperor Nero. The picture of this proud, profligate, energetic old woman, betrayed into a galley contrived like those in the time of the French *Noyades*, to give way and sink under her, — her escape, after being hit on the head by a slave with an oar, her floating, swimming, and struggling to the shore at Baie, and being taken to her own Lucrine villa only to be afterwards assassinated in her bed there, — had a fascination, not unmixed with a sensation of terror for Lady Charlotte, moving her to observe that it was impossible for her to hear such a story, in the very place where it had happened, without being thankful no one could put her "on board a boat that was all to crack and come to pieces," or come and kill her at the Villa Mandório "only because somebody else had ordered it."

CHAPTER VII.

FAST YOUNG MEN.

SWIFTLY the days passed on; and it became almost a usual ceremony in the little circle to end each day with "What shall we do to-morrow?" When Sir Douglas first arrived, indeed, there had been grave talk of instant departure; of breaking up bad habits by removing Kenneth from scenes of idle temptation; and of all sorts of reforming and repressive measures. But it is not so easy to move a full-fledged young gentleman of Kenneth's disposition, from a place that happens to hit his fancy. His uncle's arrival, if not followed by any very real reform of conduct, had certainly secured greater decency; and he bore with patience

(or comparative patience) the brief anxious lectures which followed the examination of very complicated and uncertain calculations as to general debts, and debts of "honour;" loans made (half from careless generosity, half from vanity) to idle young foreigners, who had no earthly claim upon his assistance; jewellery squandered on their female associates; and all the embarrassments from which, — had he probed his own heart for the truth, — he expected to be relieved by the very simple expedient of getting his uncle to "pay them off."

Nothing is more curious, in these cases of extravagance, than the puppy-blindness, which does not see, — in that first stage of manhood, — that if such debts are "paid off" by some relative or friend, the items of which they were composed were acts of meanness, and not acts of generosity. If the phrases usual on such occasions were put into the language of the pleasant old story of the *Palais de la Verité*, — where people said, not what they intended to say, but spoke the "naked truth," — how very extraordinary those sentences would sound! Conceive a man addressing his friend thus: "My dear fellow, certainly I will lend you a couple of hundreds. I'll give you all my three sisters' music-lessons, new dresses, and jaunts to the seaside for this year: and there's pale little Fanny, who costs my mother a good deal in physician's advice. I'll give you all her doctor's fees for six months or so, and she shall go without. I would not be so stingy as to refuse a friend such a paltry sum as you've asked of me, — no, not for the world."

Or thus: —

"I made little Justerini the dancer such a splendid present last Christmas! I gave her three years of my fat old father's plodding work as head-clerk with Tighthenall and Co.! He's getting old, you know: drowsy of an evening: tired out in fact: had rather a hard life of it: a good many of us to provide for. But I was determined I'd give her the ear-rings. I'd have given double, ay, six years of his hard-earned salary, sooner than not have behaved handsomely to her about them!"

Or thus:

"I can't stand a fellow refusing his chum such a paltry favour as belonging to a club, or sharing a yacht, or taking half an opera-box with him. I know I didn't hesitate a minute when Tom Osprey asked me. I gave him my mother's carriage-horses, and little Sam's favourite pony, and my father's hunters, and that little box at Twickenham

where they used to go for change of air in summer, — before Tom had half done explaining about it. I'm not one of your backward fellows. I always come forward like a man, when a friend wants anything."

Or thus — liberal only to Self, instead of Self and Co. : —

"I always say there are certain things a fellow can't do without. *Must* make a certain figure, and have certain comforts. I like to enjoy life, and see other fellows enjoy it. Life is not worth having if you don't put some pleasure into it! I was obliged to have all my old grandmother's sables and shawls last winter, — (you know she brought me up, my mother was too poor to do it); — and the portion she had put by for my Cousin Bessie; couldn't do without, I assure you; not, at least, so as to live like a gentleman. Can't see why Cousin Bessie should be in any hurry about marrying, or why the confounded prig she's engaged to makes such a point of what he calls 'mutual means of support.' All I know is, I couldn't do without her portion, and grandmother's Indian shawls and Russian sables; that's fact."

Or even thus: — among a set where shawls and sables and marriage portions are alike unknown : —

"You say you wonder, because I'm a poor curate's son, how I can get on at college? That's all you know about it: of course it's difficult; and I'm put to it to give wine-parties, and so forth, like other fellows — but it's to be done with proper management. If I take six days in the week butcher's meat that my brothers and sisters would eat; and all the coals and blankets the old women in the village used to get, — and my father's two glasses of port wine which my mother fancied kept his throat from relaxing for Sunday duty, — and a year or two of Dick's schooling, (who scarcely needs it, for my father gives him all his spare time, and he's a sharp fellow by nature), it comes to a good lump of money in the end; and, if there's still some debt left, I've no doubt I can grind it out of them sooner than seem shabby to these fellows at Oxford."

Ah! how many a true tragedy lies under this apparent farce of words! How many a "fine, spirited young gentleman, very free with his money," steps out of his hotel in the sight of admiring waiters, drawing on a pair of straw-coloured gloves in preparation for a day's pleasure — tossing double his real fare to the cabman to be driven rapidly to the place of rendezvous: and then talking to the boon-companions he

joins, it may be, of poachers on his father's estate; of some servant of his own turned away, as an idle vagabond and a thief, for taking his master's cigars and silk-handkerchiefs; of "being regularly swindled out of his money" by some jeweller who, according to custom, has sold him a set of studs and a gold ring for treble their real value, — to whom it never once occurs that the *tu quoque* of these various accusations would be but his own just due! — that he, also, is an idle vagabond, living on what he never earned; a "poacher" on the better means of better men; — a "swindler" in the acquirement of things unpaid for, or the profitable interest on which is lost in the uncertainty and delay of payment; — yea, it may be a most daring robber, whose "stand and deliver" threatens more than the lives of those whose substance has to be surrendered to him, since it threatens disgrace and ruin to himself (and through him to all connected with him) if they do not suffer themselves to be stripped of their goods, and consent to the extremity of sacrifice!

And fathers may toil, and mothers may darn, and many a Bessie pine, and many a Fanny sicken for sea-air, and many a little Dick lose his schooling; and so long as the cause of all these troubles does not actually pick pockets in the streets, or garotte unwary passengers on the highways and byeways where business or pleasure calls him, he contentedly believes himself to be living the life of a gentleman and an honest man, and would knock the offender down who dared to dispute that position.

Kenneth Ross doubted as little of his title to be thought "a thorough gentleman," as others of his creed. And yet it is certain that he expected his friends, his tradesmen, his gambling-debts, and his follies, to be paid for out of his uncle's money; was perfectly content that all his vicarious acts of generosity should (like his debts), be set down to his own credit, but, in truth, be provided for by this other man; and had never even given a single thought to what his situation, or the situation of his motley crowd of creditors would be, should his own means fall short, and his uncle, wearied out at last, refuse to supply the deficit.

But why should he give it a thought? Was he not his uncle's heir? He knew he was to be his heir. At least he had always expected it, ever since he was a child, and he believed Sir Douglas had always intended it.

Yes, Sir Douglas certainly had intended it. Up to a certain evening — the evening of a day of glory and beauty and sunshine,

spent in an expedition to Sorrento — he *had* intended it, though he did not know that Kenneth built upon it; and even that first night which saw him waver in such intentions, saw him also wakeful, weary, and tender, full of yearnings to his nephew, and occupied till early dawn with anxious repetitions in his own mind of wise council and explanation, though both counsel and explanation were to make it clear to Ross of Torrieburn that Ross of Glenrossie was assisting him for the last time!

But Torrieburn's past experience was very much against any very settled belief in such a declaration as to Glenrossie's future proceedings.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY AT SORRENTO.

As the lovely Italian spring advanced the question, "What shall we do to-morrow?" was answered more and more boldly; and the little intimate circle that had mingled with Royal balls, and musical routs, during more wintry weather (for even Naples has its winter), and whose members had availed themselves of Italian hospitalities, began to draw more and more together, seeking, as strangers naturally would, their chief pleasure in excursions among scenes, the beauty of which will for ever be described in vain in guide-books, itineraries, and travels, since not all the glowing words that were ever strung together can convey a hundredth part of the impression made on the senses by actual experience. It is a favourite phrase with poets, that we should "conjure up a vision" of such and such objects; but no magic can conjure up, to one who has never yet beheld Southern Italy, the sudden irradiation of our common world that takes place. It is the nature we always knew — but it is nature illuminated! Colour is deeper and brighter, seas are more dazzling, sunrise and sunset are inconceivably richer, mountains have gradations of purple which no pencil can translate. The wasteful wealth of fruit and flowers sets us dreaming of Eden instead of our digging and delving climes; and the very people who dwell in these favoured regions seem endowed with a quicker life. Eyes have a depth of shining, and teeth a glitter in smiling, and cheeks a warmth of glowing, that the north can never show. Like Wilson's cloud, of which he says —

"E'en in its very motion there was rest,"

even in their very indolence there is passion; and that *dolce far niente*, of which we hear so much and understand so little, is more like the tranquillity of their own slumbering volcanoes, than the settled calm which alone among us would produce it. Or, to take the less grandiose simile of Lorimer Boyd in discussing the subject with Sir Douglas, it is the difference between the contented grazing of the bovine race, and the sleek and sleepy yawning of the hunting leopard. There is real quiet in the one, there is only temporary inaction in the other.

And though the simile might not be over-complimentary, Lorimer Boyd loved the Italians. He praised their simplicity, the absence of affectation, the loving nature of their women. He denied the inferiority of their men. He held that all of best and brightest in Europe came originally from Italy. He counted over the roll of the heroic names, and came down, with an excuse for every blotted entry in history, to those later times when even her artists fought as soldiers, and her priests governed as statesmen. He would not admit, without opposition, even Sir Douglas's censure of the Neapolitan nobility. What could be expected of men who were only too well aware that Government had no feeling towards such as might be marked for distinction, but that of jealousy? Take away the occupation of literature and politics, freedom of action, and great landed interests, from the youthful nobility of Great Britain; take away their natural stake in the prosperity of their country; and what would remain even for them but the pursuit of pleasure and the driving on of aimless days? Besides, Naples was not Italy. It was that often taken and retaken town that was scarcely a nation whose blood did not mingle with the original race. French and Spanish, German and English, Greek and even Turkish, currents are in those old veins. And because Kenneth had found a set of profligates and gamblers there — as he could have found a set of idlers and gamblers in Paris or in London — was Sir Douglas to pass a sweeping judgment over the land, or attribute to the aristocracy of Naples any increase in his anxieties respecting his wayward nephew? As well might he consider it the fault of the fishermen of the islands of Ichia or Procida.

Those anxieties were perpetually haunting Sir Douglas, so much so that once or twice he let fall a word respecting his hope that Kenneth "would make creditable friendships" even to Gertrude, — recurring

eagerly to his own love in youth and boyhood for Lorimer.

And Gertrude looked grave, and said, "I know what you feel. I had once a brother."

Sir Douglas asked Lorimer about this brother. He had known them all. Did he resemble Gertrude?

No. He was exactly like his most ridiculous mother, clothed in a tail-coat instead of female habiliments—if possible even more silly, more vain, and certainly less well-tempered; and it was anything but a subject of regret that he had pre-deceased his father, for he would have been a plague instead of a protection to his mother and sister.

"How old do you suppose Miss Skifton may be? She is very grave and staid for a girl."

"She is two-and-twenty. I know her age. And she has seen much of life and its cares even for those years." And Lorimer Boyd sighed.

Sir Douglas mused on her tone and look when she said, "I had once a brother;" and on a hundred other instances which impressed his memory though they seemed mere nothings. There are persons who talk much and readily of their feelings, and who yet leave you in uncertainty both as to the sincerity and the motive of their confession; and there are others whose rare allusions to themselves and their private joys or sorrows seem to come like gleams of light, showing their whole inner nature. Sir Douglas would have been at a loss to explain why the little he had ever gleaned from Gertrude Skifton respecting herself had filled him with such intense sympathy and approval; such a conviction that her character was one of mingled gentleness and strength; fondness and girlish dignity; reserve and a subdued eagerness—which pleased him better than all the open enthusiasm in the world! He loved in her the cherishing of her foolish mother; the adoration for her dead father's memory; her easy courtesy to strangers; her sweet frank friendliness with those whom she acknowledged as intimates: with Kenneth, and Lorimer Boyd, and—himself. This last admission Sir Douglas made with a little hesitation. Her welcome of him was shyer than her welcome to them. Well, he would not have had it otherwise—she had not known him as long; and he remembered with pleasure the beautiful blush which overspread her face once when she said, "I do not feel that you are so much of a stranger as I should; because Mr. Lorimer

Boyd used to read your letters aloud sometimes, when you were in India, to my poor father; indeed very often he used to read us one; my father enjoyed them so." The expression of her countenance was always lovely: lovely when her eyes were down-cast (as indeed was habitual with her), and lovely when she slowly raised them, as she did on this occasion, with a sort of innocent appeal in them, as though they said, "I know I am blushing, but it is not for anything of which I need feel ashamed."

He thought of her perpetually, and settled in his own mind that there was not in her one iota that he could wish to see altered, or that could be changed for the better.

And Lady Charlotte was quite pleased with his evident approval, for she felt "if ever it came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie," here would be one great step gained for all subsequent arrangements.

And now they were to have one of their customary holidays, and spend the whole bright day at Sorrento: the little smiling Contessa Rufo, and a German couple, to whom she was "doing the honours" of the sights of Naples, being the only strangers of the party.

Lady Charlotte got but one scanty story from Sir Douglas; (the death of Pliny, which she declared she had never heard before,) and then she chatted with the Contessa, her companions being absorbed in the beauty of the moving panorama before them. They had left Naples at an hour unknown to indolent Londoners, and the early glory of morning yet fell on the tideless sea as they wound through the narrow roads surmounting the Bay of Castellamare; dotted with pointed white sails like wings, and showing on its rippled surface those strange dappled patches of green and purple which vary the blue of the ocean whenever it nears the shore.

Lovelier and lovelier grew the scene as they proceeded onwards. In odd nooks of the lofty cliffs nestled houses as white as those distant sails; fruit-trees and vines surrounded them; gay foliage mantled the rocky ledges; and here and there the eye could rest on the glistening tops of thickly-planted orchards of orange and lemon trees, looking like rounded domes of emerald, clustering far down in the hollows.

Fig-trees, with their broad dark leaves, and vines in tender transparent green, mocked the gray volcanic ruggedness of the lofty rocks, as they came in sight of Sorrento. Little rude staircase-like paths

straggled downwards to the caverns and coves of the beach, inviting the feet to explore them. Groups of fishermen, with women and children, loitered and basked here and there, clothed in those bright vestments in which all southern people delight. Now and then echoes of laughter, or the fragment of a simple song, came floating up on the air with that wonderful distinctness with which sounds are heard along a rocky shore,—airs which Gordigiani's exquisite setting have since made famous, and which, perhaps, it required that composer's fine and sensitive taste to strip from their ruggedness as we strip off the shell of the almond, denuding the veiled melodies from nasal and husky tones, and sending them forth to the world full only of such gentle passion as breathes in the "Bianco visin," and the "Tempo Passato;" familiar to us now from many a sweet and tutored voice even in our own land.

Lorimer Boyd had known Gordigiani's daughter. He described that sweet ethereal creature to Gertrude: her large spiritual eyes, like the eyes we imagine those of a guardian angel; her smile, faint and tender as the serenest twilight; her pretty bashful pride in being able to compose words to her father's music. But she was gone—passed away like the echo of her own songs—taken in the early prime of her sweetness, scarcely living even to the time indicated by the poetic French epitaph written on one almost as lovely:—

"Rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les Roses,
L'espace d'un jour!"

They were still talking of this young Italian and her genius; and Sir Douglas was murmuring to himself the Scriptural words, "When the ear heard her, it blessed her,"—less with any thought of Gordigiani's angel-daughter, or a yet fitter reference to "works of necessity, piety, and charity," than in remembrance of the tremulous contralto of the English girl at his side,—when a wild shriek, followed by that wonderful amount of exclamatory appeals to Madonnas and Saints of different altars, common among the Italians, startled them into attention.

The carriages were to meet them at a given point, and they had been traversing part of their road upon mules; Gertrude riding by her mother, till they had paused to gaze at the town and beach, and then falling a little into the rear with Lorimer and Sir Douglas while speaking of Gordigiani's music; the Rufos with their friends

coming next; and Kenneth and Lady Charlotte a little in advance. Lady Charlotte was in high spirits, replying to Kenneth's constant *persiflage* with more *aplomb* than usual; pricking her mule from time to time with the coral points of her white silk parasol, and laughing foolishly like a school-girl at any little difficulties in the route. Presently the mule suddenly stopped. "Oh, you obstinacy, won't you take me on 'cause I'm such a giddy thing?" giggled the rider, giving a final prod at the mule's ear with the ornamented parasol. The steel of the light parasol snapped; the sharp end entered the ear of the animal, which swerved, put its head down, and set off at a pace anything but safe or pleasant in poor Lady Charlotte's opinion. All the other mules, accustomed to act in concert with parties of night-ears, set off at a like pace. Lady Charlotte screamed, the guides shouted, and a perfect Babel of voices sent up prayers to heaven for protection, mingled with curses of the poor beast on earth. Kenneth at first leaned back in his saddle in a fit of inextinguishable laughter at the ridicule of the whole scene. Fat Count Rufo, pulling in vain at the hard mouth of his mount, and bounding in his saddle like an India-rubber ball; his pretty countess laughing also, as she careered along, flying past Kenneth with her ankles much more exposed than at the decent commencement of her ride; the German couple, also at full speed, looking helplessly at each other as they fled together like the hapless pair in Bürger's *Leonora*; and Lady Charlotte, the primary cause of all this erratic disturbance, making involuntary *soubresauts* on and off her frightened mule, such as are performed by light and nimble professionals for the entertainment of the audience at Astley's.

But all laughter was merged in fear, when the mule made a false step on a path cice to the precipice, that crumbled beneath its tread; then scrambled to recover its footing, unseating Lady Charlotte in the operation, and dragging her a few yards, pinned by many folds of careful shawling, and so utterly unable to extricate herself. Before the sharp, bitter shriek from Gertrude had died thrillingly on the air, the gentlemen of the party had reached the poor frightened woman, and rescued her from further danger. Sir Douglas had been first; leaping from his mule, which he suffered to roam at large, and not attempting the dangerous experiment of riding after her. They were close to Sorrento, close to the Hotel d'

Tasso, where already rooms and refreshments had been ordered in anticipation of their arrival. Lady Charlotte was easily carried there, and laid, half-fainting from fright and shock—but not otherwise the worse of her Mazeppa-like career—on a *chaise longue* in one of the bedrooms.

Kenneth helped to carry her in, and with a returning smile, congratulated Gertrude on her mother's safety. Gertrude smiled too, vaguely, with a confused, tearful look at Kenneth, in acknowledgment of being spoken to, rather than as hearing the exact words; and then Kenneth Ross retreated to compliment and re-assure pretty Countess Rufo, and Gertrude knelt down by her mother. Sir Douglas was still arranging pillows and shawls. If he had been waiting upon the venerable and unfortunate Queen Amélie of France, he could not have attended to her with more tender respect. He paused, and looked down on her as she lay. Gertrude's mother! That useless—ineestimable life! As he paused, the kneeling girl looked up at him; she voluntarily extended her hand to clasp his. "Oh! I thank you so!" was all she said.

The warmth of the sun, when it glitters through rain in those warm southern climes, when the rapid storms are over, and the red geranium and pale violet take glory from its rays—what was it to the warmth of Gertrude's eyes, shining through their haze of agitated tears! Her gaze thrilled the heart of him she addressed; his hand trembled as it pressed hers. Hers, that white hand with its modelled fingers—

"Lovely tapering less and less,"—

whose graceful and nimble passage over the notes of the piano he had so often watched in the accompaniments to her welcome songs. He blessed her mentally for the eager movement which had so given it, warm and gloveless, into his cordial grasp; and whether after that sudden clasping it was dropped by him, or withdrawn by her, he was made too giddy by such contact to remember.

It must have been withdrawn; for one spectator whom both had forgotten—Lorimer Boyd—passed his hand over his brow with a sense of pain, and muttered—"She is in love with Douglas!"

In love? No girl "in love" would leave her hand to be clasped as friendship only, with its firm light satisfied hold, should clasp it, if that electric thrill which flashes loves' messages from heart to heart told her she either loved or was beloved. Let us then

believe, for Sir Douglas's sake, that the white hand was withdrawn, and that the trembling downcast look with which Gertrude listened to his further re-assurances (made in rather a different voice from usual), as to Lady Charlotte's condition, resulted rather from tender embarrassment than from any lingering misgiving as to her mother's danger.

Lady Charlotte had indeed sustained no hurt. Her extreme fragility and slenderness had caused her to fall so lightly, that not a bruise was discoverable beyond a little abrasion on one of her wrists; and the quantity of soft shawls of very rich texture, slipping with her as she fell, made a sort of cradle for her head and shoulders during the brief interval of risk, when she was dragged along the path by the rocks.

"But it *might* have been very serious; I *might* even have been killed, mightn't I?" she repeated over and over again, not without a little feeling of pleasure at having been the heroine of so dangerous an adventure. And as often as Gertrude assented, and pressed her lips on the faded face, with—"It might, indeed, my poor little mother!" so often did Lady Charlotte, with a sort of cooing murmur of pity for herself, assiduously smoothe and twine round her finger the ringlet, which had been made terribly dusty and unsightly during the *culbute* of its possessor, and had required more than ordinary care to restore it to form and brightness. The Hotel di Tasso overhangs the sea, and on that side at least there is comparative silence. Lady Charlotte, therefore, wearied by her inauspicious ride, and lulled by the sound of gently-lapping waves far beneath the windows, and by the heat of the afternoon sun, carefully as it was shut and shaded from her, soon fell fast asleep. For a short interval Sir Douglas and Gertrude remained motionless, listening to her measured, slumberous breathings. Then he proposed to her daughter to come out, to join the rest of the party, who had already braved both heat and fatigue, and clambered to the Capo di Sorrento: and they sallied forth, not unwilling to enjoy their walk according to the implication conveyed in that sweet Irishism, "alone together," the "*presque seule*" of the pretty French widow, who was asked if she was going alone into the country.

And now all again was gladness, and all again was bloom and beauty; wild flowers sparkled along the shore, even the to very verge of Neptune's domain. On the lovely headland grew tufted patches of myrtle, and the tall pointed white heather which

gleams like the ghost of some unknown harvest of another world. Down in the dream-land, under the far away sea, lay shifting shadows of broken white fragments, which are held to be (and why should they curiously doubt it?) remnants of palaces and temples, over which the waters have closed, as over O'Donoghue and his white horse and valiant retainers in our own island of fairy traditions. Fatigue was unfelt; that air of which the elder Tasso spoke —

"Si vitale, che gl' uomini che senza provar,
Altro cielo ci vivono, sono quasi immortali,"

fanned their faces, and made the very act of breathing a pleasure.

"Up the heather mountain and down the craggy brae,"

undesiring of further rest than frequent pauses to take their fill of gazing, or to listen laughingly to some pretty peasant, some distaff spinning matron, some bouquet-giving child, all vainly endeavouring to explain in their curious patois, requests to the sight-seers which resolved themselves most distinctly into an unromantic act of mendicancy, — the gay party reunited on their homeward course; and arrived at the hotel to find Lady Charlotte alert, and recovered; only too willing to hear from Sir Douglas the mournful romance of the poet Tasso's mad love for the high-born princess, whose ducal brother had him imprisoned in darkness and solitude for years to expiate his presumption; and his miserable return, after insane and wretched years, to his sister and the old half-forgotten home.

And when that romance in prose was ended, Countess Rufo's German friend repeated Schiller's wonderful ballad of "The Diver," and his wife sang one of the sweet wild songs, whose harmonies are indeed "songs without words." And after that, on low pleading from Sir Douglas, and urging from all the rest, Gertrude sang.

Some irresistible fancy of the moment urged Sir Douglas to inquire if she had ever heard the ballad of which he recollected the one verse of farewell, as sung by his mother. Yes, she knew it; but even she could not recollect all the words. She did not think it was a complete ballad, but an old fragment of a song of exile; not, she said, from a "foreign" shore, as Sir Douglas had it, but the "Irish shore," and without further preface she began it, in the clear, rich voice he loved so to hear.

And while they listened, the day depart-

ed, and the moon fell on the unruffled sea; where the fisherman's tiny barks flashed, gleaming for a moment, and turned their sails again to shadow. The mountains rose beyond, dark and majestic, and the huge form of Vesuvius slept, unlit by its fiery torch, in the white light of the moon. The oars ceased to sound; the voices from the shore became less frequent; the very waves seemed to come more and more softly to the sands, till at length there seemed but one sound left on earth — her voice!

The broken fragment of a song is in many an old collection: —

"A lightsome heart, a soldier's mien,
And a feather of the blue;
Were all of me you knew, dear love,
Were all of me you knew!

"Now all is done that man can do,
And all is done in vain;
My love, my native land, adieu,
For we ne'er can meet again.

"He turned him round and right about
All on the Irish shore;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With Adieu for evermore, my love,
Adieu for evermore!"

The tender tremulousness of the last line, and the beauty of her face looking dreamily out over the sea as she sang, melted the heart of more than one of her listeners. But no one spoke to her of her song except Sir Douglas, and he said to her, in a choked, passionate voice, "If I thought it were 'adieu for evermore' between us — in lieu of a sweet, sorrowful dream — I should go mad!"

It was a declaration of love, like any other; or unlike any other, for no two declarations of love are alike, any more than any two leaves on a tree, or human faces, or voices, or even the handwriting of different persons, can be alike.

And though Kenneth and Lorimer Bord and Count Rufo and the ladies of that happy party all spoke to Gertrude afterwards, she could not have told what any of them had said, except that at last she heard her mother say, in her softest canary-bird voice, "Well, and what shall we do to-morrow?" And Sir Douglas said, "I have business in the morning, but late in the day we might go to Amalfi, and stay a day or two there."

CHAPTER IX.

A LIFE OF PLEASURE.

BUSINESS in the morning. That special morning had long been dedicated to the

final examination and arrangement of Kenneth's difficulties, at least so far as his continental tour was concerned. And now there was yet something else which his uncle desired to talk over with him, beyond and above the unpalatable fact that he must confine his expenses to his own means, and expect no more of this system of what he carelessly termed "clearing" him, henceforth and for ever.

Sir Douglas arrived at Kenneth's apartment on the Chiaja very early, very anxious, rather weary, and thoroughly resolved. He had begun to think there was some truth in the severe opinion expressed by his friend Lorimer Boyd, that the great misfortune of Kenneth's life was his uncle's indulgence.

"Of course," that friend had said, "as long as you put a feather-bed for him to fall upon, he will pitch head-foremost like a harlequin, into every scrape and trap on the stage of existence. Leave him to suffer consequences. Either he is capable or incapable of self-conduct. In the one case all your love and pains won't save him, and in the other he will at last find his real level. If I had had an idea you were so in your dotage about this lad, Douglas, I declare I never would have written to you. I expected you to come down upon him in a stern, dignified, offended-guardian sort of way, and here you are for all the world like a nursing mother, whose precious babe has had a tumble! Do, for God's sake, let this be the last time that you actually help him to escape from the only lesson his careless mind can profit by—namely, bitter experience."

There was truth in these words; and they beat hotly in Sir Douglas's ears, as he turned restlessly on his pillow the night they returned from Sorrento. The hours of that night passed on from silvery moonlight to the blue dawn and the crimson glory of sunrise, without bringing him needful rest. There was too much in the day that was coming, and the day that had passed, for night to be anything but a bar or a gap to divide those intervals.

When the morning stir of life began once more,—early as such life begins in the streets of Naples,—Sir Douglas bathed, dressed, and went out. Even if Kenneth was not yet up, he would wait. His nephew's manner, the previous evening, had rather wounded him. It was saucy, sullen, and dissatisfied. It was easy to see that he *bought* himself maltreated, and his uncle efficacious in the matter of Lady Charlotte. Kenneth knew that Gertrude disliked and

resented any overt disrespect to her mother, yet he could not for the life of him abstain. He thought Lady Charlotte ridiculous, and he showed that he thought her so. He thought Gertrude neglectful of him, and almost, in her calm way, repellant to him the evening before. He was accustomed to be flattered and caressed. He had bid them all good night very curtly, getting out of the carriage in the Chiaja, instead of seeing them to the Villa Mandorlo, and had walked away with a cigar in his mouth,—looking so like his handsome wilful father, that instead of feeling angry, foolish Sir Douglas looked after him with aching tenderness and intense good-will!

On arriving at his lodgings on this particular morning, not only Sir Douglas did not find Kenneth up (that perhaps with his habits was scarcely to be expected), but it was doubtful, from the hesitating manner of the servant, whether he had been in at all, since the previous day. Sir Douglas said little to the man, and passed into the room which had been the scene of his first interview and useless lecture. Breakfast was laid, as then; but not yet touched. All was in the same sort of order, or disorder. The very sunshine appeared to be lying in stereotyped lines on the parquet floor. Sir Douglas threw himself into a lounge chair by the window, and once more thought over all he meant to say to his nephew; putting it into the most patient loving words he could frame.

Gradually the silence and warmth, after the rapid morning walk and long wakeful night, had their effect in spite of anxiety; and Kenneth's uncle slept as soundly as Lady Charlotte had done after her adventure with the recalcitrant mule at Sorrento.

It is Lord Brougham's theory (and it is also the theory of other thinkers on the same subject) that dreams occupy only a few moments before our waking, and that during their brief passage through the brain, they blend and connect themselves with outward objects of sense and sound. In proof of which, he says, you have only to go and run a pin sharply into a slumbering friend, and he will inform you, as he starts into consciousness, that he had dreamed for a considerable time; that he has, in fact, had a very long dream of being attacked by robbers in a wood, or otherwise wounded,—with all graphic and interesting details; all depending on that cruel little poke with a pin which you privately know you had experimentally inflicted upon him!

Sir Douglas dreamed a very pleasant dream, of wandering in Paradise with Ger-

trude (and without Lady Charlotte) through interminable groves of orange-trees, white with blossom and golden with fruit, while, — beyond a sort of rainbow caused by the spray of innumerable fountains, for ever rising and falling and lapping against basins of white marble carved with wreaths of immense lilies — forms of angelic grace, in shimmering vestments of the faintest and most delicate colours, sung to their golden harps in a most ravishing manner; ending always with the burthen "Here, there is peace!"

Just as he was straining his dreaming ear for words he could not catch — owing apparently to the very indistinct pronunciation of these agreeable angels — something struck him, lightly but sharply, on the temple; and again immediately afterwards on the cheek.

He started and woke; but so strange was the scene acting round him, that for a minute he fancied that also must be a dream.

A woman shabbily dressed, with resplendent black eyes, and a thin black silk shawl carelessly adjusted over shoulders very obviously deformed, was picking out from manuscript notation a melody of Blumen-thal's for the guitar. A young girl (scarcely in courtesy to be called a young lady), rather pretty, very pale, and dirty and neglected in her dress, sat at the breakfast-table, picking the bones of a chicken; not ungracefully, though she picked them in her fingers and seemed exceedingly hungry. Another "young lady," still prettier, still paler, and (if possible) in a still more neglected toilette, sat perched on the scroll-work end of the stiff satin sofa opposite Sir Douglas's chair. It is to be presumed she was less hungry than her companion, since her occupation was biting off with her very even white teeth the budding oranges and orange-flowers from a large branch she held in her hand, and aiming at the sleeper with these fragrant pellets.

When this young nymph beheld his amazed eyes open and fix themselves upon her, she leaped from her perch with a lithe activity which even Zizine could not have surpassed, and shrieking out, "ai sveglia! ai sveglia!" — with a peal of laughter re-echoed by the other occupants of the apartment, she fitted to the furthest end, where a heavy *portière* of yellow silk divided the outer from the inner chamber; and folding the massive brocade round her, so as only to leave her laughing head visible, seemed to expect that the victim she had so unceremoniously attacked would start from his

trance and follow her. Perceiving after a little breathless pause that this was not to be, she flung the curtains behind her, and returned, making first a few slow steps on the very tips of her toes, then the light and rapid run performed by ballet-dancers, then three or four pirouettes in succession, and a profound curtsy as a finale. During the bewildered moment that followed, while Sir Douglas, feeling his situation already sufficiently absurd, looked angrily round for his hat, she skipped, cat-like, into one of the great armchairs, and stood up in it as in a rostrum, leaning her arms over the cushioned back, with a roll of music which she had snatched up on the way, and with most gravity of recitation commenced an oration.

"Stimatissimo Signore," said she in a most nasal Neapolitan patois, "we rejoice and felicitate you on having slumbered so well, and we hope!"

What further foolery they might have performed cannot be known, since just as Sir Douglas attempted to leave the room with the courtesy — even to them — of a bow which should include the trio, and amid renewed peals of mocking laughter, the door opened and Kenneth came in.

Kenneth!

His aspect in that bright Italian morning could scarcely be surpassed in degradation. Staggering drunk; his eyes bloodshot; stupefied; his hair dishevelled; his dress neglected and disordered; his face almost as pale as those of the wild intruders ready present, he stood, swaying to and fro with the handle of the door in his hand, apparently attempting to comprehend what was going on in his rooms. The door, like many in the old palaces of Naples, was overlaid with tarnished but richly-patterned gilding; and beyond it was another of the heavy yellow satin brocade *portière*. He stood there like a picture set in a wondrous frame. His youth, his exceeding beauty, the grace and strength of his form only made his present state of untidy helplessness the more saddening. It was a horrible vision! There was a moment of suspense during which all stood still. Then his countenance, which had worn a sort of puzzled, embarrassed, idiotic smile of greeting, suddenly assumed an expression of savage anger as he turned slowly from looking at Sir Douglas, and fixed his red eyes on the group of women, now huddled together, the elder adjusting her shawl and rolling up her manuscript music, as if in the act of departure.

"How dare you come here? how dare

hundred times have I forbid your coming here in the morning?" muttered the half-conscious drunkard in broken Italian.

"You told me on the contrary last night to come to breakfast, and that you would give me a good breakfast," whimpered the girl, who had been seated at the table picking chicken-bones.

"You told me you would like to practise that barcarole, and besides, Signore, to-night is my benefit!" rapidly protested the elder of the three; "and I wanted, therefore, to see your Excellency." Then they both spoke together, with loud, shrill, vehement chattering; till the nimble dancer who had awakened Sir Douglas by flinging orange blossoms, and who had hitherto sat dangling her feet from the arm of the great chair, as a mere looker-on, interfered, and struck up the hand Kenneth had extended towards them in angry gesticulation, with the words, "Val tu sei ubriaco come un porco"—"You're as drunk as a hog." Kenneth seized her by the arm.

"Who says I am drunk? Who dares to say I'm drunk?" shouted he; "you shall be punished—you shall be imprisoned."

"Lascia!" exclaimed the girl, releasing her arm from his grasp, and looking him contemptuously in the face—"e dormi!" "Bestia!" added she in a tone of disgust, as she shook her arm free, and attempted to pass him.

There was a moment when Sir Douglas actually expected Kenneth would return her insult with a blow. He made a step forwards—Kenneth's arm dropped heavily by his side, but he continued to look at the girl with a dull glare of anger.

"Go!" said he. "Get out, all of you!"

"What a polite Signore!" said the dancer, with a forced laugh; "ah! there is no one like an Englishman for fine manners."

"Go!" shouted the drunkard, with an infuriated stamp of his foot; still leaning on the lock of the door with his left hand.

"At your pleasure!" bowed the girl, mockingly; and she followed her frightened companions out on the staircase. As she passed she turned her pale pretty head, as the head of the Cefici is turned in the famous picture, and snapped her fingers at him with a gesture of derision and defiance common among the lower orders of the Neapolitans, and which those who study books of chiromancy can find and practise if they please.

There are occasions in life in which what we think beauty seems to wear the devil's

stamp on it, and becomes repulsive instead of attractive.

Such an occasion was the present! Impossible to be more regularly and perfectly beautiful than Kenneth Ross: he might have been painted as an ideal Apollo. Impossible to have thrown more intense grace of attitude into any action than was shown in that pallid girl's vulgar and unseemly farewell. But the effect of all this grace and beauty,—under the circumstances,—on the sole spectator was as if he had been struck down by some demoniac spell.

As the door closed on that departing group Sir Douglas sank back in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Kenneth also seated himself with a staggering gait, and, leaning both arms across the breakfast-table, addressed Sir Douglas; clipping his husky words, and alternately attempting to stand, and dropping back into his seat.

"You think, I suppose, that these people ain't—ain't respectable? They are respectable! Wife of leader of orchestra,—great friend of mine, and leader of orchestra. You couldn't lead orchestra, for all you give yourself such connoisseur airs about music. Quite respectable. *Could* you lead orchestra, now? 'Come, I say, could you, uncle? and he laughed an idiotic laugh.

"O Kenneth, go to bed, and end this scene."

"No, I won't go to bed. You think I'm drunk. I'm not drunk. D—— it, do you think you're to come the schoolmaster for ever over me, as if I were ten years old? I ain't drunk. I know all about it. I know that—that to-day's Tuesday; and we're—we're going to settle accounts. There! is *that* drunk? And we're going—going to Amalfi—going to pick up old ladies who can't ride,—can't eh? Going to—Amalfi. All right; let's go to—to Amalfi; only don't say I'm drunk; and don't set old mother Skifton saying I'm drunk; nor Ger—Ger"—

Sir Douglas sprang to his feet. "Wretched boy!" exclaimed he, "don't dare to utter her name."

Then recovering himself, he repeated sadly, "O Kenneth, go to your room; go to bed; I'll not irritate you by any observations; if you're not drunk, at least you are not well. We can't talk business while you are in this state. We will put off business till to-morrow. I will return for you later. It is very early still; you will get

some hours of sleep. Give me your hand. There, go to your room. Good-bye for the present. Go and rest."

The cigar-smoking valet bowed Sir Douglas out, muttering, with obsequious smiles, that he would give "remedies;" that his young excellency had unfortunately "met some friends" late last night, and that the "friends" often persuaded his young excellency to excesses he would not otherwise think of; winding up (in the inevitable style of Italian flattery) that he was sure the young excellency, *in reality*, would have greatly preferred being with his beloved and illustrious uncle, to all other society, in Naples, or elsewhere.

The story of Kenneth's evening would indeed have amazed that sober uncle! Going towards his lodgings in a very discontented frame of mind, he had met with and joined a group of those so-called "friends," returning from the theatre of San Carlo. The rest of the night was spent by all in gambling, drinking, and dissipation. When day-dawn was near, he had again lost sums that for him were enormous. The two men who were the largest winners were all for departing with their gains. Kenneth objected: he claimed his *revanche*, and appealed to the others. A hot dispute ensued, some of those present being for dispersing, and some thinking Kenneth's proposal no more than reasonable. A young Portuguese nobleman, whose reputation for riches had made him the centre of a certain circle of wild young men, then took the side of the loser. He insisted on remaining and sharing the fate of the *revanche* with Kenneth. They staked and lost, staked and won, staked and lost again. At length one of their boon companions addressed the Portuguese in a bantering tone, "Come, Marquis, you are out of luck; try once more, — any stake you please, — and that shall end it." The young man looked round, set his teeth with a strange smile, and said, "Well! I'll win it all back with a yard or two of cambric. Mr. Ross, will you go halves in my luck? Two throws of the dice; that won't greatly delay us."

Yes; Kenneth would go halves in the stakes. What was it to be?

The young Marquis rapidly divested him-

self of his coat and waistcoat, drew over his head one of those wonderfully embroidered Parisian shirts, which he coolly informed the company had cost him seven hundred francs; * observed with a scoffing laugh as he took his stand by the gaming-table, that his present costume closely resembled that of an English gentleman about to engage in a boxing-match (a sport in which foreigners believe we continually indulge), and then threw the dice. In a few minutes his adversaries, who had thought the scene infinitely diverting, looked rather grave: they had had their throws, and lost.

He had won back the greater portion of the sums they had hoped to divide amongst them.

He lifted the embroidered dandy garment from the table, tossed it over his arm, made a salute full of gay irony to the company, retired to re-invest himself with the usual amount of clothing, and was heard, a few minutes later, humming an air from the opera of the evening, as he passed down the Toledo on his way to his hotel.

Kenneth had departed with him; having drunk almost too deeply to stand or walk, and with a dim sense, even then, of shame and annoyance, increased, as we have seen, to more intense irritation by the scene which awaited him in his apartments.

Shrouded now in luxurious curtains, his head feeling as though blistered with fire, and with just enough sense remaining in sullen consciousness of pain, — cursing his folly, his valet, and the remedies by which the latter proposed to put him in a condition to re-appear creditably in the course of the afternoon, — Kenneth remained in blank hours "resting" in his disordered apartment; while Sir Douglas, once more stepping out into the morning light, directed his steps to the quarter of *San Luca* and to the verandas of the *Villa Mandic*.

"There," thought he, as he looked at the pleasant sunshine falling on the white walls, "there, at least, dwells such an image of peace, purity, and quiet affection, — might mend any man's broken trust in the goodness of human nature."

* This anecdote is a fact.

CHAPTER X.

NOMINAL LOVE.

KENNETH ROSS also betook himself to the Villa Mandorlo.

Tolerably early in the afternoon (considering all that had occurred), he got languidly into an open carriage, and directed the coachman to drive there, leaving a message for Sir Douglas that he would join him with the rest of the party instead of waiting his return at the palazzo.

Truth to say, Kenneth had no great wish to meet Sir Douglas again so soon: perhaps to listen to comments extremely unpalatable on his recent conduct; certainly to feel embarrassed and annoyed by the recollection of what had passed. He had other reasons for desiring to pay this visit as speedily as possible, and he dressed with more haste than was usual with him, or consistent with his many little luxurious fancies, making one long pause before a full-length mirror ere he turned to leave the apartment, he and his valet both fixedly contemplating the image reflected there.

The valet smiled: he thought the young Excellency must be quite satisfied: no one could see more than that his Excellency was "*un poco pallido*," which was rather interesting than otherwise.

But for once Kenneth was too absorbed to care for compliment. For once he was thinking seriously; though it must be admitted those profound reflections entirely centred in Self.

He was thinking—with that irritated discontent which, in ill-regulated minds, takes the place of penitence—of all the scrapes, follies, and entangled snares of his past life. He was thinking, not without a certain degree of kindness, of Sir Douglas. Not with much gratitude; for it is a very curious fact that gratitude seldom follows over-indulgence; there is no gratitude where there is not respect, and a consciousness that the benefits conferred have not only gone beyond our deserts, but beyond our deserts even in the opinion of those who have conferred them. That fond yielding—that love without a conscience—which can "refuse nothing" to the object beloved, is trespassed upon again and again, without creating any corresponding sense of favour shown or sacrifices made. It grows to be depended on with blind confidence, but it is received with so little thankfulness, that if at any time a limit seems to be reached, and a halt made in the system of benefactions, the recipient forthwith looks

upon his position as that of an ill-used martyr. "The idea of Old Sir Douglas sticking at helping me now, when he has come forward a dozen times in much worse scrapes without saying a word!" was a speech of Kenneth's over which Lorimer Boyd had frequently growled, but the sentiment of which, to the speaker, seemed perfectly just and natural.

There is a training which helps a man to see life in its true aspect, and there is a training which leads him to see all things reversed and upside down. There are also, it must be confessed, men on whom, as on certain animals, no amount of training seems to tell: minds which no warning will impress: souls to which that text has no mystery and no meaning which bids us "stand in the way and consider which were the old paths, and walk in them:" hearts which are brayed in the mortar of suffering, and yet remain hard. And this because the inner human nature is subject to as much variety as the outward human form. You may take half-a-dozen children of the same parents, and put them under the same tutor and governess, the same spiritual pastor, the same conditions and opportunities of life; and out of all that sameness you shall have a diversity of character so startling that the utmost stretch of our intelligence can scarcely comprehend it. Yet we shut our eyes to the fact. Some rosy fearless prattler lifts its brilliant gaze, and tells us of another little one who stands aside and pouts, that her brother was "always shy from a baby;" some old nurse echoes the opinion that "Master Jackey was the troublesome one in our nursery; Master Willie was always easy to manage;" but not the less does "his honour the Magistrate" continue to rate the mechanic for having neglected to "look better after" the precocious little thief for whom the perplexed father says he "allays did his best;" and not the less do parents of honest well-conducted children complacently attribute to their own "bringing up" this satisfactory state of matters,—never heeding the patent fact that their dissolute neighbour, who has brought up his children on oaths and "skilfully," is also the father of pious innocent daughters, and of laborious decent sons.

Nor can you shut your child in a crystal case, to save him from harm and pollution. You can but set good and evil before him for choice, (as much good and as little evil as may be,) and the balance of his nature does the rest: just as you can but give him the best mental teaching your means will supply, and the balance of his intelligence does

the rest. It was Solomon, not Jesus, who pronounced in the self-confidence of human wisdom that if you brought up a child in the way he should go, when he was old he would not depart from it. There are those who remain sons of perdition; those who sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. It may be true that human hearts are as a general rule "deceitful and desperately wicked," but some hearts are *more* deceitful and *more* desperately wicked than others. The heaven of sin may exist in all, but most assuredly it never was so perfectly mixed as to secure to each an equal distribution. The "weak brother," and the man who "hath said in his heart there is no God," will display their varieties in the thorny open ground which has superseded the Garden of Eden, even as it came to pass, in the earliest motherhood on earth, that Abel reverently knelt to the All-seeing and All-punishing Creator, — and Eve's other son, Cain, slew his brother!

Kenneth had had his fair average chances. The good and the evil had both been before him. If his untaught and ungovernable mother had made his holidays, both in boyhood and youth, times to try the relative proportions in his nature of better and worse; in those far longer periods which were *not* spent with her — the periods of school and college — he had the advantage of wise and excellent masters, and companions not likely to corrupt him. And even in his earlier home his tutor step-father had done his duty honestly and carefully by the boy; both before and since the mismatched marriage which Maggie's great beauty at that time bewildered him into making, even without reckoning the possession of a settled home where he expected to be, but never was, master. Over-indulgent Sir Douglas had not been there to spoil his little nephew; and his letters and theories were models of good counsel and grave affection.

Such as Kenneth was, then, he was of his own created nature; having resisted (what alone can be bestowed by the fondest guidance on the best or the worst of us) all attempts made to show him what was amiss in his inherent disposition, — all persuasion, however eloquent the persuader, to "stand in the way and consider," — all efforts to bring him not so much under the government of others as under self-government; the only rule which is safe from rebellion.

On this especial morning he had, as has been stated, that dim discontented consciousness of the result of his errors which

is quite distinct from, and independent of, any feeling of repentance. He felt that somehow or other things had gone wrong, and that they required setting to rights; and the mode in which he resolved to set things to rights was by marrying Gertrude Skifton, and giving up, after that, at all events in a great measure, many of the habits which led to so much disaster and inconvenience.

He had always intended this, ever since he had first made her acquaintance. He was what is called "smitten" immediately with her grace of manner, with her singing, and even with her looks, though Gertrude was not a showy beauty. He heard she had money; and altogether he settled in his own mind that she should be his wife. He made no more doubt of her acceptance of him, whenever he should ask her, than he did that the sun would rise next day. He had received what he not unfairly considered encouragement from her mother; he was constantly, incessantly, asked to the house; and though Gertrude herself did not do or say much in the way of encouragement, she was evidently more pleased to see him than other friends, and she was, he considered, "one of your quiet girls," who could not, under the circumstances, be expected to say more. He had intended to wait to make his uncle aware of his choice, till the scrapes and embarrassments of his position were cleared away. He could hardly go to Lady Charlotte Skifton and propose for Gertrude, till his affairs were in a little better order. But this morning he had changed his mind. He was afraid, after the scene he had witnessed, that Sir Douglas might consider some probation or purgatory necessary, which would not at all suit him. He resolved therefore to cast the die; to make the step he contemplated irrevocable, and *then* go to his uncle, and say, "You see I am engaged to marry this girl, a marriage that cannot but please you, who have been preaching something of the sort this long time. Now settle up the difficulties which press upon me and let me have a proper start, and I'll turn over a new leaf, — for in fact I'm sick of the life I'm leading."

When he entered the marble-paved sitting room with bright carpets scattered over it, which opened into the decorated gardens of the Villa Mandorlo, he thought, as Gertrude rose to greet him, he had never before seen her look so beautiful. Her complexion was ordinarily rather dull and colourless; but to-day a pink flush had settled in either cheek, and her manner had

something in it tremulous and excited, very different from usual. So different, indeed, that Kenneth began by hoping Lady Charlotte was "none the worse for yesterday," conceiving that Gertrude might be nervous on that account.

"No; not at all, thank you. Mamma is quite well; quite; and glad to go on our expedition. We are to sail—Sir Douglas says—to Amalfi. He said he thought it would be less fatiguing, and that you were not very well. Indeed you do not look well," added she, compassionately.

Kenneth was not sorry that he looked interesting and pale; and plunged very immediately into the story of his love and his hopes; having indeed arranged the thread of his discourse as he sat with folded arms in the carriage that had brought him to that familiar portico. A little, very little of the perfect security of acceptance which he felt, pierced through his love declaration. He tried to keep it under, but it was too strong for complete repression.

As Gertrude listened, instead of becoming more nervous and abashed, she turned extremely pale; and fixed her eyes at last on Kenneth's face with an expression of amazement not altogether untinted with pain and displeasure.

There was a moment's pause when he had ended his rapid and declamatory pleading; then she spoke, in a low clear voice.

"Mr. Ross, if I had ever given you encouragement—if I had ever even perceived the attachment you say you feel for me, so as to be able to give discouragement to such a suit—I hope you believe that I would not have left you in doubt on the subject. I never expected this; I never dreamed of it. I will end a position so painful to both of us at once; and tell you that Sir Douglas——"

"If my uncle has had the cruelty to come here this morning to poison your mind against me, only because of an unlucky scene at the Palazzo——burst in Kenneth, with excessive anger, without waiting the conclusion of the sentence.

"You are mistaken, utterly mistaken; he never mentioned you except to say that you were unwell—that we had better sail instead of drive, for that reason."

"What then?"

"How shall I tell you? I had intended you should hear it from him. He is gone to your home. He went half an hour ago; he said he had appointed with you to return"——

She stopped, apparently in painful embarrassment.

"What had he to tell me?" said Kenneth, fiercely, his mind still full of the idea that his affairs had somehow been the subject of discussion.

"What I must tell you,—now,—at once,—and I hope then we may both forget what has just passed between us. Sir Douglas has asked me to become his wife, and I have accepted him."

Kenneth stared at her doubtfully, angrily, incredulously.

"You are to be married to Old Sir Douglas." "I am to be married, I hope, to Sir Douglas?"

With a loud hoarse scornful laugh, Kenneth rose.

"Come, you will not cure me by ridicule, of my attachment to you," he said. "My uncle is fond of treating me as a child; and if you and he have agreed on some way of reforming me, it is much better you should both be serious, and let me have the benefit of it."

The offended girl rose also, and with a degree of dignity and sternness of manner of which Kenneth had not thought that soft nature capable, she replied—

"It would, in my opinion, be extremely indecent to jest on such a matter. Nor is Sir Douglas likely to turn his anxieties for you into an acted comedy. I have engaged myself to be his wife. I loved him, I may say, before I even saw him. All I heard of him, all I read of his writing to Mr. Boyd, gave me the impression of his being one of the most loveable of men. I did not know in those days that this great happiness was reserved for me—that he should choose me for his wife; but what welcome you have had here (a welcome with which you now reproach me) was, I assure you, on account of your relationship to him. I saw you with interest—with curiosity—as the nephew of the friend whose letters Lorimer Boyd had so often read to us, and the bravery of whose gallant exploits he was never weary of recounting."

Kenneth did not speak. He stood, still staring angrily in her face. His head ached and swam. His hand trembled as he leaned it on the table between them.

"Mr. Ross," resumed his companion in a softer tone, "you are very young; I think you are very little, if at all, older than myself. You will forget the pain of this day, and you will believe—for indeed you may—that I shall always feel as Sir Douglas

does towards you. — and I religiously believe that you have hitherto been the main object of interest in his life."

She held out her hand as she spoke: but Kenneth did not take it. There are men who when they are rejected by one they thought to win, enter into the despair of sorrow; and there are others who under like circumstances enter into the despair of fury, and who say things at such times to the object of their so-called "love," which through all their burst of selfish frantic rage they themselves know to be cruel, atrocious, miserable and cowardly falsehoods.

Kenneth passed from the declaration of his so-called love into this despair of fury. He accused Sir Douglas of the basest treachery; of having supplanted him by a thousand manœuvres; of having been aided by Boyd to "cut the grass under his feet" from motives of vengeance; Lorimer having himself desired to attain the destiny which he, Kenneth, had made his one great hope in existence. He accused Gertrude of "throwing him over," because his uncle and Boyd had conspired to betray to her his embarrassed circumstances; of preferring Sir Douglas only after she had made the discovery that Kenneth was not to be his uncle's heir; of coquetting, and flattering the former into a passion for her, because she thought it a finer thing to be Lady Ross of Glenrosie than to share his own less magnificent home. He told her he did not believe that she had been indifferent to him, or blind to his obvious attachment; that it was all humbug about his welcome having been given for his unknown uncle's sake. As to that falsehearted uncle, he bitterly affirmed that if Sir Douglas married her, he was marrying from anger, not from love; marrying because he was disappointed in his idea of governing and bullying as if Kenneth were still at school. That no one had a worse opinion of women generally. A thousand times Kenneth had heard him speak of the sex with contemptuous pity and mistrust; and a thousand times declare that he himself never intended to marry, even when urging his nephew to do so. Finally he alluded to Gertrude's "jilting, or having been jilted by," the foreign prince to whom her mother had endeavoured to marry her. He made the open taunt that "even now, perhaps, she did not know her own mind;" and he stopped raving only because his heart beat so violently that he feared another moment would bring death to end its tumult. Panting, wild, staggering backwards, he dropped into his chair.

"O Mr. Ross, will you hear me?" murmured the girl he had so insulted, approaching him with that mixture of pity and dread which may be seen in the countenances of those who are nursing a delirious patient.

"Do let me speak to you!" she glided yet nearer, and rested her trembling fingers lightly on his sleeve, as his clenched hand stretched across the table.

In an instant he started to his feet again.

"Don't touch me, girl!" gasped he in a thick suffocated whisper; "don't dare to touch me! Your touch makes me comprehend how men are brought to commit great crimes! I tell you," and his voice rose again, "that I do not believe you; and if I find it true, and that I have been made a dupe and a sport of, between you and a uncle and Boyd, I will stab Sir Douglas in the open street, — so help me Heaven!"

With this blasphemous adjuration he reeled towards the door; it opened as he reached it, and Lady Charlotte, with a paled expression of fear on her face, confronted him.

"What are you both talking of, so loud and dreadfully?" she said.

"O mamma! beg Mr. Ross not to go yet! beg him to wait till — till!"

Gertrude looked in her mother's pale foolish bewildered face, — made an attempt to meet her, and fainted.

CHAPTER XL

THE WAYWARD HEART.

THEN Kenneth had an opportunity of verifying the truth of a beautiful saying, namely, that God, who makes such various degrees of weakness and strength in this world, ours, never yet made anything so weak that it will not seek to defend what it loves.

The feeble silly woman who was Gertrude's mother, said her few true words of passion and defence, as sensibly as if she been the most strong-minded of females: reproaching Kenneth for his want of generous feeling, and gentlemanlike patience under disappointment. She relaxed indeed, into quizzical foolishness at our comment, when she told the exasperated man, that if he really loved her daughter, "ought to be glad to see her better than to himself;" and that of course, on her own part, she liked better to have Sir Douglas with her, who amused her, than treated her with consideration that Kenneth, who only laughed at her. No could she forbear adding, with reference

the new suitor for her daughter's hand, that she felt more as if he was a papa-in-law than a son-in-law, as she herself was not very old, and Gertrude was so much younger, and there was "so much unexpectedness about the matter;" but she was sure it would make everybody very happy (Kenneth included) "by and by, when they all got used to it."

Gertrude, in a few trembling sentences, better adapted to soften the wrathful and selfish mood of her disappointed lover, obtained at last of him that he would behave outwardly as if nothing had occurred; await with what patience he could Sir Douglas's explanation, and allow all arrangements to proceed for their day together, without blighting it by a vain storm of unavailing complaint.

"It is partly for your own sake, Mr. Ross," she added, in a voice as sweet as her singing, and with a sorrowful smile; "chiefly, indeed, for your own sake; though it would be a miserable beginning to my different future, if I thought I were to be in any way the cause of alienation between you and your uncle. I could wish him never to know that you had an ungentle thought towards him — never to know" —

"Of course, I don't want him to know that I have been here on a fool's errand this morning," said Kenneth bitterly, "at all events, till I choose to tell him myself."

"There is no necessity to tell him. I wish you could look upon it all as a dream. You cannot think how unreal it all seems to me, that — that you should think you loved me!"

"It is a dream that will haunt me through life, whatever you may think of it," replied he, quickly and passionately; "but God knows what may happen. You are not his wife yet, and perhaps you never may be. Don't you think I had better begin behaving as usual by going down to see if the boat is ready? I will wait for you there."

He spoke the last sentence with a wild sort of joyless laugh. In truth, Kenneth was not even now perfectly recovered from the previous night's drunkenness; and the very first thing he did when the carriage had whirled him back to the Chiaja, was to increase still further the state of mingled depression and excitement in which he found himself, by pouring out and tossing off a full glass of Florentine "Chartreuse." His thoughts wandered from Gertrude; wandered to Lorimer Boyd; to an observation of his as to the ludicrous contrast between the supposed retirement for the service of

God and devotion to thoughts of Heaven, involved in the profession of monachism and the establishment of a manufactory for the sale of spirituous liquors, perfumes, rouge, soaps, and delicate unguents, for the support of the monastery and its inmates: "selling the devil's wares to build churches with." Then, with a rush, came back all the pain and mortification of the last hours. Very reckless, very comfortless, Kenneth felt, and very lonely, alone with the monk's green bottle. Some young Italian friends came in, and rallied him on his dejected looks; told him he was no Englishman if he could not stand a merry night without being ill the next morning. Kenneth did not stand rallying well, though he was fond of practising it towards others. His friends thought him ill-tempered, and left him to lounge away an hour somewhere else. Kenneth took a cigar; smoked, considered, and drank again. Then, with an impatient sigh, he once more took his hat, and with a sort of dreamy plan yet to supplant his uncle Douglas, and overcome the difficulties in his way, and, with an increasing conviction that Gertrude, "in reality," had cared, and did care for him, and that somehow he was being made the victim of a plot for his reformation, he sauntered to the shore; hailing the lazy boat, with its lazy occupants, on a lazy sea, whose wavelets beat like a slackened pulse to and fro in the sunshine on the smooth sands, — and feeling all the while as if he were walking in a dream. The scent of mignonette and violets was in the air, and more than once a flower-girl crossed his path, and smilingly tossed him a bunch of pale Neapolitan violets, — sure to be paid on some careless morrow, with ten times the value of her flowers, — and looking after the handsome young Englishman with something like a puzzled anxiety, on account of the unusual look of abstraction and anxiety visible in his countenance.

The tranquil do-nothing-ness of the people smote him as he passed. Life, and life's cares, what were they in Naples? Why should any one sigh, or dream, or be anxious in such a climate and among such a population? Why should he be less careless than the dark-bearded, dark-browed, sallow men lounging outside the cafés? Why not enjoy life as the laughing loud-talking crowded groups in the overloaded *calessos* did, as they rattled along? What folly to pin a man's hopes on *one* hope, and deem all life to come darkened, because one capricious girl repulsed his love for the singular, the ludicrous, caprice of preferring.

his elderly uncle! A little whimsical twinge of vanity wound up all, such as rounds those quaint, old-fashioned verses on baffled love:—

"Will, when looking well can't win her,
Looking ill, prevail?
Prythee, why so pale?"

He looked across the blue sea streaked with rippling gold, and at the sails that here and there flitted over its surface like white butterflies, and felt his great irritation die away for the hour, in a mixture of stupefaction and languor. His uncle stood by his side, and had placed one hand on his shoulder with caressing cordiality, before he was even aware of his presence. He started, and looked up into the frank soldier-like countenance with some attempt at an answering smile.

"I have been to the Palazzo," said Sir Douglas, cheerily, "but, like the old woman in the nursery ballad, when I looked after my sick puppy, he was out, and quite recovered. No, not quite recovered," added he with sudden gravity—"how ill you look! Oh! Kenneth my dear boy, if you could but mend your ways! if I could but see you what I dreamed you would be!"

"For God's sake let us have none of that now," muttered the young man as he turned away towards the boat.

"No, no, you are right: not now, not now: I had something, however, something quite different to say to you, Kenneth, but it will keep till to-morrow: there is no time for anything; here come our ladies, and Lorimer."

Our ladies! yes; for that day of careless companionship; and then—what then? Was Kenneth indeed to be distanced and put aside in his wooing by the man whom, if he had guessed the world through, he never would have hit upon, as his rival? It seemed scarcely credible. He would try yet. He would throw for that stake again. He could not get rid of the notion, based on his excessive vanity, that there was some agreement to test and try him; to pass him through a sort of ordeal of hot ploughshares, and then all was to end in an agreeable little comedy; his uncle smilingly joining the hands of the young couple, and giving them his paternal blessing. The idea strengthened as Gertrude and her mother advanced; the latter giving a little glad wave of her fringed parasol at Sir Douglas and calling out something about "military punctuality on the field of battle;" the former, with all the serenity of her soft eyes gone,

anxiously looking, not at Sir Douglas, but to Kenneth, and taking his hand with a sigh of relief, while the flush deepened in her cheek as he had seen it deepen in the morning, when he first entered the Villa Mandorlo to declare his love.

It was Kenneth too, who handed her into the boat, and seated himself by her side; his uncle and Lady Charlotte being opposite, and Lorimer Boyd unslinging his sketching portfolio and putting it down with Gertrude's guitar case at their feet. For the moment, Kenneth's spirits rose.

No one could tell, not even Kenneth himself—for these things depend as entirely, as the warning sense of danger in animals, on quick instinct rather than reason or calculation—why the conviction of his hope being founded on folly and on expectations that never would be realized, fell suddenly with a cold chill on his heart.

Something in Gertrude's manner to Sir Douglas, something in Sir Douglas's manner to her; in the intense quiet gloom of Lorimer Boyd; in the fidgety and increased attention of Lady Charlotte to his uncle;—struck his excited mind as proof positive that the little comedy he had conceived might be enacted for his benefit, was not being played: that was all real bitter earnest: that he had vowed in vain to quit his foolish course of life and "better his condition" in more ways than one, by uniting his destiny with Gertrude Skifton's; that he had planned in vain scenes of lover-like anger, and lover-like forgiveness, when she should at length admit that she had merely joined his guardian friend in schemes of reformation; that she had no such scheme, and no *arrière pensée*, but in all singleness and truth of heart loved Sir Douglas, and was beloved by him.

Those who have been jealous,—who have known what it is to receive that

"Confirmation strong
As proofs of Holy Writ"—

which is brought to the inner soul by looks, words, or circumstances which to uninterested spectators seem trivial, or utterly indifferent, may comprehend the revelation. It was not brought by any increased *empressment* or happy security in Sir Douglas's manner; he had always been dignified, even from boyhood, when his inimical step-mother had sneered at him as "that very gentleman-like young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross;" he was the last man in the world to make a public wooing of the object of his choice. Nor was Gertrude likely to in-

dulge in that peculiar manner sometimes not very gracefully adopted by "engaged" young ladies. To a stranger and ordinary acquaintance, the very curves and indentations of the Bay of Naples could not seem more unchanged since the previous day, than the conduct of all parties concerned. But to Kenneth, enamoured as far as his nature was capable of diverging from self, stung and shaken in the very midst of an utter security of success—and involuntarily watchful of the least sign that should confirm or alter his wavering conjectures, the meaning of all he saw was written in fire on his brain: the "Mene mene, tekeli, upharsin," that prophesied the loss of his heart's kingdom, came between him and the shining white sail of the lightly wafted boat,—even as it stole over the marble walls of the feasting monarch in Scripture. His head, aching and dizzy from the renewed excess of stimulant taken on his return from the Villa Mandorlo, became confused alike from the crowding of comfortless thoughts and the movement of the bark over the waters. He passed his hand across his brow several times as if in pain, and began talking wildly, cynically, and in a strain anything but moral, of love and lovers. The attempt to answer, or to repress his talk, only excited him the more. He was conscious, but rather as if dreaming than waking, of the expression of shame, sorrow, and anxiety which clouded his uncle's face; of the intense and deadly fear in that of Gertrude; of the utter scorn in Lorimer Boyd's; while Lady Charlotte, really angry at the things said before her daughter, but not knowing exactly how to notice them, kept biting the end of her parasol and repeating with a foolish smile, "You naughty boy, aren't you ashamed to say such wickedness before your uncle?"

Kenneth noticed her addressing him, with a hoarse laugh. "Oh, my uncle is younger than I am," he said; "we are to be soon-companions soon. I believe he is in love. Mr. Lorimer Boyd, grave Mr. Lorimer Boyd, were you ever in love? were you a faithful shepherd, or do you hold, as I do, with Alfred de Musset—

Lorimer est le grand point, — qu'importe la maîtresse?

Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse?

Il est vrai que Schiller n'ait aimé qu'Amélie, Goethe que Marguerite, et Rousseau que Julie, et la terre . . .

What comes next? by Jove I can't recollect

in the least what comes next. Do you recollect, uncle? you're a French scholar."

Sir Douglas was looking back towards Naples. "I think we will return," said he, sadly and sternly. "Kenneth, you are quite well enough to understand me when I say that your conduct here, where those present have no option but to listen to you, is an outrage on all good taste and good feeling."

Kenneth looked towards him with fierce moodiness, apparently irresolute what reply to make. Then, his eye falling on the guitar-case, he sullenly touched it with his foot. "Perhaps you think there should be no conversation at all. Singing would be better: love-songs: chansons d'adieu: 'Partant pour la Syrie,'—which, being a soldier's love-song, the French take, very properly, for their notion of a national hymn. Shall you sing again this evening, Miss Gertrude Skifton? Shall you sing us a chanson d'adieu?"

The lovely eyes were lifted to his in mute deprecation and appeal, but in vain.

"Do sing! sing us the song of last night: Adieu for evermore!"

"Kenneth, I implore—I *command* you—to be silent!" said Sir Douglas, in a voice trembling with suppressed passion.

"Silent? quite silent? very well—yes. I am *de trop* here. I'll sing an adieu myself. I'll give you an adieu in plain prose. Don't trouble yourselves to put back to Naples by way of getting rid of me; I'll give you 'adieu for evermore' without that; for I'll bear this d—d life no longer."

With the last sentence Kenneth stood up; rocking the boat, and causing Lady Charlotte to utter a series of little sharp short shrieks of terror. As he spoke the concluding words, he touched the mast lightly with his hand to steady his leap, sprang head foremost into the waves, and sank before their eyes!

Gertrude's shriek echoed her mother's. "This is my fault," she said wildly. "Save him! save him!"

Lorimer Boyd watched the water with a keen glance. "Can any of you swim?" he said to the boatmen, laying his hand heavily on Sir Douglas's arm, who had already thrown off his coat in preparation for rescue.

"Io, Signor!" answered one of the men.

It is a strange fact that in a seafaring population like that of Naples very few of the men are able to swim; and still fewer have either courage or presence of mind in emergencies like the one which had just occurred. Many of our English sailors cannot swim. Many gentlemen in various

professions, to whom that accomplishment would be not only useful, but perhaps absolutely necessary, are equally ignorant of it. When the St. Augustine college at Canterbury was established, it was resolved that even those who were preparing for holy orders should learn to swim; more than one of the pious and energetic followers of George Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, having lost their lives from incapacity in this respect.

One man and one only, on board the Neapolitan bark of pleasure which bore Kenneth and his companions, could swim. That one had been a coral-diver, and, in the exercise of his dangerous profession, many a bold and daring feat, many a narrow and hair-breadth escape, had been his.

"Io, Signore!"

And, while he spoke, he stood half-naked, watching, as Lorimer Boyd watched, across the waters near at hand, — for the wretched, beautiful, drunken youth who ought to rise there, or somewhere thereabouts. A dreadful watch.

But Kenneth was cumbered, not only with the will to perish, — the will of a drunken languid man, — but the clothing he had almost mechanically adopted in preparation for a moonlight return to Naples, over the chilly waters of the sun-forsaken sea.

A heavy fur pelisse, strapped and fastened at the throat, in addition to the usual over-coat, made Kenneth's habiliments a dreadful chance against his safety from that self-sought grave. The merciful chance was in his favour, that the coral-diver, Giuseppe, was one of the crew that day.

While others of the crew were exclaiming and praying to saints and Madonnas, this man stripped to the last and lightest of garments, and watched and waited; and, when the involuntary rising of the drunken suicide took place, he was there to rescue him.

There was no struggle. Kenneth was utterly insensible when Giuseppe swam towards the bark, which neared him as far as was practicable. The difficulty was to get both on board. That also was accomplished at last, and the bark was steered towards the haven it had so lately left.

CHAPTER XII.

BITTER PANGS.

SNATCHED from death, — but pale, insensible, and apparently dying in spite of

rescue, Kenneth Ross was borne on shore, and taken to the luxurious lodging in the Palazzo on the Chiaja, which he had so lately left in the pride and strength of youthful manhood. Sir Douglas accompanied him; loth to lose sight of him even for the purpose of escorting Gertrude to the Villa Mandóro. Lorimer Boyd would see her and her mother home.

To Lorimer Boyd, her father's friend and her own, Gertrude Skifton resolved to confide the agitating events of the morning: to beseech his intervention with this hot-headed and reckless young man, and to endeavour in some way to arrange so as to spare Sir Douglas the pain of knowing what had occurred between him and Gertrude.

"I am sure," she said, "you will forgive me for appealing to you, Mr. Boyd. Your constant kindness to my father, — for many a weary day of suffering and illness, — and your tender compassion to myself and my poor mother, make me look to you almost as a second father, as a friend who will not forsake or think anything a trouble. Do not let Sir Douglas know what has passed. I owe to you all my first knowledge of him: of his goodness, his unselfishness, his courage, his loveable qualities. Of course, when I saw him — (and here per Gertrude both smiled and blushed) seeing him rather surprised me. I had imagined a much older and sterner man. He is gentle. . . He is so good. . . I cannot understand how Mr. Kenneth Ross could venture to vex and anger him. But I rely on you: on you, entirely, dear Mr. Boyd, to smooth away all difficulties, and prevent Mr. Kenneth Ross from being injured, as Sir Douglas from being vexed; and I am sure you will manage this — for my sake!"

What if Lorimer Boyd winced under this appeal, — this placing him in the rank of a "second father," while it placed Douglas Ross (his schoolfellow and contemporary, as a hero of romance and adored lover) No sigh escaped him; no shadow clouded his friendly smile; no extra pressure of the eager little white hand extended to him told of a more than common and relied-on interest in all that concerned Gertrude Skifton. He undertook to reason with Kenneth; to endeavour to persuade him to travel; to do his best to spare a single pang to Sir Douglas; already in possession of a prospective happiness which might well repay, in Lorimer's opinion, any amount of previous pain or sacrifice.

He left the Villa Mandóro as the moonlight stole over its white walls and

green verandahs, with a heart at rest, as to his willingness to serve the gentle girl who bid him farewell in happy trust. And she sent her whispered blessing far through the moonlight across the blossoming almond trees; down to the rippling sea which laved the shore where that Palazzo on the Chiaja covered in the unquiet night, passed by Sir Douglas by the couch of his nephew.

In the strength of youth and a good constitution, strong in spite of excess and fatigue, Kenneth struggled with the shock of his late rash attempt at suicide.

More fondly watched he could not be than by his uncle. Unconscious of all that had passed between Kenneth and Gertrude, attributing his state of mind merely to the pernicious habits which had taken possession of him, his fondness more sensitively alive than ever, after the horrible danger which had been averted, Sir Douglas sate alternately watching and reading by the bedside of the reckless young man; giving remedies; speaking from time to time in a soothing tone of tenderness which seemed to lull the half-conscious mind; waiting for clearer thought, and more exact answers, as to the grief of heart which had impelled him to that folly and sin.

No clue, however remote, to the real cause had reached him. As he gazed from time to time at the pallid beautiful face, with the damp curls still clustering heavily round the brow, he pleased himself with a peaceful dream of the aid Gertrude might give hereafter to his efforts at reclaiming this prodigal; and imaged to himself the sweet irresistible voice pleading, even more successfully than he himself could plead, the cause of virtue and the value of tranquil rational days.

Towards day-dawn Kenneth became entirely himself—conscious, and miserable; conscious, and fiercely angry. To the gentle inquiries which hitherto had either received a confused response or none, he at length made fierce, sullen, but coherent replies.

"You think me drunk or wandering," he said; "you are mistaken. I have my senses as perfectly as you have yours. I know you. I know all your treachery and cruelty: all that you have plotted and contrived: all that your coming to Naples was intended to effect, and has effected. I now that, hearing of my love and Gertrude's beauty, you came here predetermined to outwit me: that Lorimer Boyd has assisted you in every step you took. hat, while you affected to be endeavouring to reform me, you were undermining

the very roots by which I held to life: and, while you spoke to me of marriage and a steady peaceful future, you were mocking me with a parcel of meaningless words."

"Kenneth, Kenneth, my own poor lad, do try to be rational. I am here, beside you; longing to serve you; ready to make any sacrifice for you; loving you in spite of all error, with as deep a love as ever one man felt for another. Trust me, my boy; trust me! tell me your vexations: something more than common weighs upon you: if I can lift it away, do you think I will not do it? My dear lad, try me."

As he spoke he leaned eagerly, tenderly, over the pillow, looking into those dim wild eyes, as if to read the thoughts of the speaker.

Kenneth closed them with a groan. Then, lifting the hot weary lids, with a fierce glance at his uncle, he muttered, "You mock me even now. I tell you, you have yourself ruined my destiny. You spoke to me of marriage, of reforming my life, of purity, of peace. You, you have deprived me of all chance of them. Gertrude Skifton was my dream of peace and purity and marriage, and you have taken her from me. She loved me. I know she loved me—till you came to poison her mind against me,—you who swore to protect me."

"Kenneth," said Sir Douglas, in a solemn tone, "Do not mock the name of love with such blasphemy, for the sake of vexing me! Do you forget that this very morning, in this very apartment, I saw the companions of your dissipated hour, and witnessed a scene incompatible with any thought of a future of peace and purity, such as you speak of desiring to attain?"

"What of that?" passionately exclaimed his nephew. "Will you persuade me you yourself have lived the life of an anchorite, pitching your tent for ever among preachers and puritans? I tell you, whatever you witnessed this morning, that I loved Gertrude Skifton; ay, and Gertrude Skifton loved me—and, if she has accepted you, it is because that worldly idiot, her mother, has persuaded her to do so; persuaded her that it is better than marrying me,—a half-ruined man,—and nearly as good a thing as catching the Prince Colonna.

"Good God!" continued he wildly, raising himself on his elbow, and looking fiercely in his uncle's face—"do you forget that we were together every day for two months before you ever came amongst us? Do you suppose I believe that you came all the way to Naples for me, and not

for her? You lecture me; you preach to me; you tell me of my profligacy, my extravagance, and the Lord knows what besides. I choose for my wife a good pure girl, of good family, with a fortune of her own, with everything that may give me a chance of rescue, and you come and take her from me! I tell you I curse the day you ever meddled with my affairs and me. I tell you, if you marry this girl, you are marrying the woman I love, and who loves me; loves me, not you, whatever she or her mother may persuade you to the contrary. Ask all Naples whom she was supposed to favour before you came between us! Ask your own conscience whether you have not sought to divide us, knowing that fact. Ask her, whom I reproached this morning, and whom I curse in my heart at this moment for her wanton caprice; I curse you both. I hope the pain at my heart may pour poison into yours; I hope heaven will make a blight that shall fall on your marriage if ever it does take place, and turn all that seemed to promise happiness into gall, wormwood, and bitterness. I hope"——

"Oh God, Kenneth—cease!"

It was all Sir Douglas could say. He said it with ashy, trembling lips. His face was as pale as that of the half-drowned man who cursed him now from his pillow.

It was all false; cruelly false; that he had known of this love; that he had plotted against it, that he had "out-witted" his nephew. It was all false, he trusted (nay, knew), that Gertrude would accept him merely from ambition. Surely she might pretend to far, far greater rank and fortune than he could offer her! It was all false that he came to Naples knowing of this intimacy. Of this Lorimer Boyd had spoken never a word in his letter. But one thing remained true: and that one thing went near to break his heart. He was Kenneth's rival. Kenneth! his petted, idolized, spoilt boy, his more than child, on whom he had poured the double love bestowed on his dead brother and on himself. The scene rose up before him of that brother's death-bed. Of the bruised painful groaning death; of the wild fair woman; of the little curly-headed child sitting at the pillow, smiling in his face, thinking he was the doctor come to cure all that shattered frame and restore his father; of his brother's imploring prayer to protect little Kenneth and not to disown him!

And now, there he lay,—that curly-headed child,—a wayward angry man just escaped by God's mercy from the crime of

self-murder, and declaring his life blighted by the very man who had sworn to protect him.

Kenneth's rival!

Sir Douglas turned that bitter thought over and over in his mind; watching through the comfortless night,—long after opiates and exhaustion had quieted that bitter tongue, and given temporary peace to that perturbed heart.

Kenneth's rival!

How to escape from that one strange depressing thought! how to make all these reproaches seem vague and senseless, as the sound of the storm-wind sweeping over the surging sea!

In the morning he would see Gertrude; she would speak of this; they would consult together; something then might be contrived and executed to soothe and save Kenneth. Till he saw Gertrude, Sir Douglas would resolve on nothing.

But, when the morning came, and the bright early day permitted him, after the restless hours of that long, long night, to seek the home that sheltered her more peaceful slumbers—she told him nothing!

The serene loving eyes again lifted to his face seemed without a secret in their transparent depths; and yet, of all that stormy yesterday, that scene of reproach which Kenneth had vaguely alluded to, not a word, was breathed.

Sir Douglas would not ask her. His heart seemed to choke in his breast as often as he thought to frame the words that might solve his doubts. Was it delirium? Was it possible Kenneth had so much "method in his madness" as to rave of scenes that never took place, and feelings that were imaginary?

Was it a dream? or had Sir Douglas indeed passed this wretched night, cursed by the being he had loved better than all else in the world till he met with Gertrude? If it was not a dream, what could he do? How extricate himself from that position of grief?

Almost, when Gertrude said tenderly, "You look so weary, I cannot bear to think of the night you must have gone through"—almost the answer burst forth—"Yes, it has been a bitter night!—is it true? Oh! tell me if it is true? Am I poor Kenneth's rival?"

But the soft eyes, in their undisturbed love, dwelling quietly on him, on her mother, on all objects round her, seemed for ever to lull the wild question away.

He would stay with Gertrude till it was likely Kenneth would be awake and stir

ring, after all the exhaustion and the long slumber that follows an opiate; and then he would have a quieter explanation with that young angry mind; and learn how much or how little was unremembered delirium, and how much was truth, in the ravings of the night before.

Gertrude walked with him through the long pergola, under the trailing vines, out to the very verge of the seaward terrace, from whence by a rocky path a short cut would lead him to the Chiaja.

He looked back after they had parted, and saw her still watching him; the tender smile still lingered on her lips; her

folded arms rested on the low marble wall which bounded the terrace. The morning light fell in all its freshness on her candid brow and wavy chestnut hair, and deepened into sunshine while he gazed.

It was an attitude of peace and tranquil love. He paused for a few seconds to contemplate her; returned her smile (somewhat sadly), and hastened onwards to greet Kenneth at his wakening — for it was now some hours since he had left him, and Sir Douglas felt restless till some more intelligible explanation should succeed the frenzy of the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLED JOYS.

THERE are days in life during which, though we have all our senses about us, we seem to be walking in a bad dream; and such was the sensation with which Sir Douglas retraced his steps that morning. Outward objects made no impression. The beauty of the scenery, the tumultuous stir of the population, the greeting of casual acquaintances, alike passed unheeded. He was what is not unaptly termed, "baried in thought:" deep and dark is that burial, but it is not calm like death. The quick blood beat at his heart, and throbbed in his temples. It was almost with a feeling of joyful refreshment that his mind woke, at last, to a perception of visible and earthly things, under the influence of one of those sudden storms that visit the Mediterranean. The rain came in heavy drops, in drifting streams; the sea changed from blue to green, from green to purple, and sent its waves, fringed with wrathful foam, dashing from the bay over the shore, to crown with a mixture of silver and snow the heads of the stunted trees that grow in a formal line along the Villa Reale. In that change he breathed more freely. He stood for a few minutes gazing at the scene, bareheaded; his cloak fluttering in the wild wind—as he used to love to stand on the hills above Glenrossie when he came back, an eager boy, for his Eton holidays. The pain at his heart seemed lightened. The demon of doubt which oppressed him (though he was scarcely conscious of his cause of torment) made itself wings and went out into the storm. As he ascended the staircase of the Palazzo he met Lorimer Boyd coming down. "He is asleep and doing well," said the latter as he grasped his old friend by the hand. Then he passed rapidly down, and Sir Douglas proceeded to his nephew's room.

The peace of sleep is nearly as beautiful as the peace of death—nearly as beautiful as that unutterable calm whose placidity awes us when we sob over our lost ones, and compels us to pause in our weeping, and gaze on the face whose many changes were so familiar and so dear; yearning for a break in that calm, a quiver in that strange set smile, something that shall seem human and sympathetic—something, we know not what, that will not freeze as with such intense conviction that the smiles, and tears, and sunshine and shadow, of earth's emotions are over; and that what we loved

has passed away to the world where there is no more change!

Pale and peaceful, without a cloud on the young smooth forehead; recovering, apparently, from all evil effects of yesterday's events as quietly as a convalescent child; thus it was that Sir Douglas found his nephew. A little fluttering tremor in breathing coming now and then, like a light movement of leaves in spring-weather, alone spoke of past disturbance. His uncle sat down once more where he had watched during the preceding night, and watched again—and so watching, ceased to think of himself, and thought entirely and only of Kenneth. How nearly he had lost him: how horrible this day would have been if the young man who lay there in stillness and shadow, was dead instead of sleeping!

Thinking of all this with a tender heart, the watcher bent forwards to the slumberer and kissed his cheek. Gently as that kiss was given, it seemed to rouse the dormant faculty of thought; the expression of pain and anger flickered anew over the features, the short savage laugh which Kenneth laughed when he was provoked, sounded feebly from his lips, and he muttered, "No, Gertrude, no—"

"Come not to weep for me when I am gone.
Nor drop your foolish tears upon my grave;"

there's a true poet's true thought for you! Where—where is—where am I?"

With the last words Kenneth looked round wildly, uncomfortably. "I thought she was here," he said: "women are such fools! But she is not fool enough for that;" and the same laugh, painful to listen to, was repeated.

"Kenneth, I do adjure you, if ever you felt affection for me, try and collect yourself, and be frank with me, instead of making my heart ache with your wild sayings."

The lip of the speaker quivered as he spoke, and he looked at the young face with almost piteous appeal. But Kenneth only laughed again, more bitterly. "Your heart ache!" he said; "Well, that is good! what is it, another of your rhymesters says, '—condemned alike to groan!'—alike to groan! It's all fair, you know—'alike to groan.' You say, let's talk of Gertrude Skifton; I say d—n her, don't let's think about her any more! The poet says—Do you know that your friend, Lorimer Boyd is a poet?—Fact. A sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow. I said, when I read it, 'Well, my dear fellow, go in and win—if you can.' He can't, my dear uncle—be-

came— Good God, what is that?" exclaimed he, suddenly interrupting himself: "that—that figure in white? It is not Gertrude; I thought at first it was Gertrude,—it's more like Lady Charlotte, but it's a drowned woman—ha, ha, ha; some one has pitched her out of the boat! No—I declare it—it is my mother; don't you see it?—strike at it. Go round and sit there—hinder those things from crowding round me: there's a crocodile lifting its snout out of the water on to the bed. I thought crocodiles lived in the Nile; I—I never saw one before—help, uncle, help!"

The thread of thought was broken. From this time, for many days, Kenneth merely raved. In his ravings the most insolent reproaches to Gertrude, to Lady Charlotte, were mingled with the most passionate declarations of love; and promises, if she would abide by him, to "lead a new life," and be a different creature. At one period he seemed to consider that she had consented, and that Sir Douglas had returned to Scotland. "Now we shall be happy," he said; "I don't wish him dead—I never wished Old Sir Douglas dead; but I'm glad he's gone. I hope he's gone for ever. I hope I shall never see him again—never—never—never! We'll go where he can't follow, over the sea, under the sea; I've been under the sea. It is beautiful, only there are crocodiles and sea-serpents, and strange dreadful things"—

And then again the delirium of fear would seize him, and the suffering, which it broke Sir Douglas's heart to witness, would take a form yet more painful and terrible, as it diverged yet farther and farther from the realms of reason and probability.

The best medical advice could do little in a case like Kenneth's. The disturbed brain must suffer its miserable fever, the disease must "run its course," and then those who cared for the prolongation of that erring life must trust to the great mysterious chance of "strength of constitution" to carry him safe past the storm of that trial into some haven of quiet and health. And into that haven sailed the storm-beaten bark of life, in spite of rent and shattered sails. Kenneth was pronounced "out of danger," "convalescent," "nearly as usual." Friends congratulated, companions came to see him. The sounds of laughter and common conversation were once more heard in that silent woe-begone chamber. The sunshine of glorious Italy was once more allowed to send rippling smiles over the uncarpeted floor. The hour of suffering was past, as far as bodily suffering was concerned.

But the mental suffering which Sir Douglas had endured was not past. In the long dreary hours of his steady and patient watches by that bedside, all the knowledge that his nephew was delirious, all the comfort mixed with pain which such knowledge brought, could not avail entirely to smother the conviction that something had in very deed and truth occurred between him and Gertrude Skifton; some love-passage, some declaration accepted or rejected, of which Sir Douglas had never been informed by his betrothed wife.

Frank by nature, and frank on principle; loving truth as all noble natures love it, and holding it as the first of religious virtues; his soul shuddered at the sorrowful doubt that sometimes overshadowed him. He used to rise after listening to Kenneth's ravings, and go with rapid impatience to the Villa Mandorlo, determined to put this doubt to the test; to question Gertrude; to clear up the mystery of this disturbance. And then would come the revulsion. Question her? If it could be necessary to *question*; if, in the relative positions in which they stood towards each other, confidence was not spontaneous; would it lessen his grief to wring from her any answer? Would that answer be guarded and cold? Would she resent being doubted, and account for it all? He was haunted by her sudden exclamation in the boat, the day that Kenneth tempted Providence by leaping from it into the waves. "Oh, this is my fault," she had said—"my fault! Save him! save him!" How was it her fault, if Kenneth had not in some way been justified in reckoning on her love? How otherwise could it be her fault? Once only (bitter "once!") had the subject been broached between them; and her answer only added to Sir Douglas's perplexity. It was after a series of more than usually virulent and scornful outbursts from Kenneth through feverish hours of rambling, that Sir Douglas, jaded and weary, had entered at the open door from the terrace into the room where Gertrude sat absorbed in thought. She started when conscious of his approach, and looking at him with sorrowful tenderness said, "I should not have recognised your step, it was so slow! Oh, you will be ill yourself—I am sure you will. Is Kenneth very bad, very wild to-day?"

"Yes, Gertrude, very wild! He has been raving of many things. Hard bitter reproaches to me who have done him no conscious wrong. Hard bitter reproaches to others—to you—to your mother. I wish"—

What he wished he could not say; he stopped in agitation, only to see how agitated Gertrude was; she did not lift those unequalled eyes to his face as was her wont; she looked down: she trembled: she stretched out both her hands with a sort of blind groping for his, which she held almost convulsively in her own. "Oh do not believe him," she said; "you know he is delirious. He loves and honours you; he has no other thought: people speak exactly the reverse of their real sentiments in their illnesses. I heard the doctor say so. He would not vex or harm you for the world when he is himself. And as for me," she faltered, "I am sure he should not reproach me; I have no wish but for his good."

How could she shape her sentences so as to satisfy this generous heart? How tell him that in the wild appeal for love made to her by that reckless nephew, his final phrase had been that he would stab his uncle in the public street? Her part was surely to soothe and reconcile all differences: to conceal all bitterness: not to set the uncle against the beloved nephew by repeating frantic words, spoken perhaps in the incipient stage of this dreadful malady. Was she not already, indeed, the cause, the involuntary cause, of disaster and disappointment to Kenneth? Not so much with reference to his supposed love for her, — which she herself looked upon as a wayward passing fancy, — but with reference to his prospects in life. Was she not building up her own happiness on a sort of downfall of his previous expectations? No longer to be his uncle's heir, no longer his first object; she herself to be that first object, and perhaps mother to sons dearer than even he had ever been, to the loving heart that beat beside her.

Trembling, flushed, shy with a thousand such crowding thoughts, Gertrude struggled through her conversation with Sir Douglas; adjuring him above all things to try and spare himself so much fatigue; advising him "not to sit always listening to painful things when it could do Kenneth no good." Till at length, when Sir Douglas rose to leave her, she crept a little closer to him, and murmured once more — "And remember *all* he says is delirium!"

Sir Douglas was tall, and in their farewells Gertrude had a pretty customary shyness of bowing her head beneath his, to receive his parting caress. As they stood together now, with clasped hands, she moved her head gently towards him: but the lips that were wont so fondly to press the glossy chestnut hair, refrained from their habitual

salute. His hand wrung hers, with something more of grief than love; and when she looked up she saw his eyes full of troubled tears. "Oh, Heaven!" she said, "you are quite worn out! Do not sit with Kenneth! Do not listen to him! Do not trust a word he says in such an illness as this! Leave the nurse with him, this one night, and come back and let me sing to you in the evening. The first time I ever saw you I was singing!"

Sir Douglas sighed painfully. He too remembered that night. Kenneth was in attendance upon her then. It was he who had accompanied his uncle for the first time to her home. He was turning over the leaves of her music-book, when she asked who the stranger was, and received the audible reply that it was Kenneth's uncle, "Old Sir Douglas." The scene rose like a vision before him. He saw the slender handsome youth standing by the instrument, and the girl whose soft glance had been lifted to his, and then withdrawn in the embarrassment of being overheard in her questioning; an embarrassment which he recollected sharing. A pang shot through his heart, sharper than any that had yet visited it. Was it not more natural that these young companions should love each other, than that Gertrude should lean across the gap of years that sundered her from himself, and prefer him to one whose faults she could not know, and whose advantages were so many? All of a sudden he seemed to grow old, as in a fairy tale! Memory flew back through crowded adventures. Midnight fields of silence, after battles fought in foreign lands. The deaths, long, long ago, of companions in arms, whose children were now grown up; whose widows were remarried; the mourning for whom was a forgotten thing. Passionate fancies that had tempted his youth: some bravely withstood, some yielded to and repented of, but all so far away in the vista of the irrevocable past; all so long, so very long ago! Almost he felt ashamed of the sudden choice, the rash avowal, the witchery that had enslaved him to the young girl, who, it was true, he had seen daily since his coming to Naples, but who, two months ago, was a stranger to him! Was it thus, that a man in mature life should choose a companion for the remainder of his days? Had he done selfishly, blindly?

Thought is a thousand-fold more rapid than words. Scarcely had he held the little taper fingers in his own without speaking, long enough for her to wonder at his silence, before all this and more had passed

through his aching brain. An exclamation, almost a moan, escaped his lips, ere he at length pressed them fervently on her forehead. One sole idea, — that he was ill, — possessed Gertrude. For the first time she returned his caress; twined her arms round his neck, as if to bring the dear head nearer; and murmured passionately, "If you won't take care for your own sake — take care for mine! What will become of me, if you are ill without me?"

That evening Kenneth was left to the nurse. Not for long: the night-watch was still kept; but during the clear and lovely evening, Sir Douglas sat and listened to Gertrude's singing; watching the mouth that sang, and the shadowy downcast eyes that seemed to dream over the notes.

He gazed and listened. He told himself he did not doubt her. To doubt her was not possible. Yet he felt sad; the old classic fables taught him in his boyhood rose as if to mock him, and the story of the Sirens disturbed his mind, even while he told it to Gertrude, and laughed.

She watched him after their farewell, as he passed darkly through the moonlight, down the shelving tiers of terraces.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I do right. It is better he should never know. We shall all have to live much together. He must not learn to think of Kenneth with aught but love and trust. And Kenneth himself will grow to think of all as a dream. But oh! how I long to have no thought hidden from him: to tell him all: and what a pain it is to feel that it cannot be!" And then her mother, who also had watched that receding form, turned and kissed the flushed cheek where still burned the touch of a more disturbing caress.

"Well, dear," said Lady Charlotte, "you know your own heart best; but I don't think I ever could love Sir Douglas! I never could feel *au niveau* of him, you know. I have observed that you never feel that. You feel *au niveau* of everybody, I believe. But I should be a little — just a very little — afraid of him, you know."

"Should you, darling mother?" said Gertrude, dreamily, — "I think him perfect! My wonder is that he could choose me: he must have seen so many far worthier than I am to be his wife."

And the young girl's fancy also wandered blindly into Sir Douglas's past. Who had filled it with woman's great event of life, — Love? Whom had he loved before he met her? — in his youth? And Gertrude felt that somehow his youth lay far away

from hers: as he had felt, at their earlier meeting that same day.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND AND A LOVER.

THE days rolled on. The doctor who had attended Kenneth especially impressed on Sir Douglas and all friends that his main safety lay in tranquillity. Nothing was to be said or done that could call back disturbance to his mind. No lecturing on pernicious habits of late hours and reckless dissipation; no allusions to the attempt at self-destruction; no contradiction; no reference to any *affaire du cœur* the young man might have; and which the doctor took it for granted, after hearing some of his vague ravings, was a point of discussion between him and his uncle. All was to be placid round him, and, as far as was practicable with his restless nature, he was to be made to share that placidity.

And so it came to pass that Gertrude's name was no more mentioned between them. No doubt Kenneth knew, when his uncle's frank countenance became clouded and wistful, that he was "casting about" how to ask that which he nevertheless dreaded to hear. And no doubt Sir Douglas, when the brow of his nephew grew dark with an expression of dislike and distrust, felt instinctively that he was brooding over his imaginary wrongs in that respect, and paining his kindly relative by all sorts of cruel suspicions which, however undeserved, no explanation would be permitted to remove.

It was nevertheless a day of joy to both when first Kenneth feebly descended the great stone staircase, and crossed from the Palazzo to the Villa Reale; leaning on his uncle's arm, and looking with dazed languid eyes at the million smiles of the rippling sea, and the fishermen's boats in the bay. And day by day, as his strength returned in slow measure, the same loving arm and patient heart were ready to give what help and solace body or mind was capable of receiving.

Once only they met Gertrude and her mother. Weary of the sights and sounds of the ever-restless Chiaja; of the rushing past of calessos and carriages; the shrill voices of the petty vendors of roasted chestnuts, melons, sea-fish, and "sea-fruit," — as the little brown urchins call the non-descript creatures which, warm from the

palms of their own dirty little hands, they propose to the stranger to buy and devour; sick of the monotony of mingling with the stream of that life which he saw every day at a distance from the windows of his apartment — Kenneth requested to be driven to Baia. At that turn in the road which presents the unequalled view of the bay and the island of Nisida, they halted and gazed out on the scene bathed in an aureole of golden sunset: and fell to talking of Italian prisons and Italian liberty — as many an Englishman has done, and will do again, in that spot of beauty and misery —

"Where all save the spirit of man is divine."

Kenneth became excited, and then rather faint. There was a pause; and then, in a wilful, peevish tone, he said, "I don't know why we talk of these accursed things; let us go on the sands; a little further on; I am quite able for that; in fact, I am sure a walk on the sands would do me good: and there, at least, there will be no shouting; no babble except the lapping of the little waves. I want to be alone; we shall be alone there."

And lone enough the curved outline of the white sandy shore appeared in the distance; but hardly had they left the carriage a few yards behind them, when, at a sudden turn, they came face to face with Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter.

"Dear me!" said the former, "we came here because we thought we should meet nobody; and who should we meet but the very persons!" —

"Whom you were anxious to avoid?" said Kenneth, with a short laugh.

"No, indeed, nothing of the kind. I'm sure, Mr. Boss; and I am extremely glad, on the contrary, to see you looking so much recovered; but the very persons we were talking about, for I was speaking of Sir Douglas to Ger."

"I hope you spoke in praise of me," said the latter, with an attempt at playfulness, and an anxious glance at Gertrude.

"Oh, no! — I mean yes of course — but, indeed, we were like the city of Zoar, you know; neither hot nor cold — he, he, he, — I mean neither praising nor blaming — but just talking you over, and how ill you looked, and all that."

Gertrude did not speak. She had offered her hand to Kenneth, who did not take it; and she extended it to Sir Douglas, and withdrew it again, his eyes being now fixed on his nephew, apparently unconscious of her movement. Gertrude flushed painful-

ly; Kenneth turned very pale; Sir Douglas strove in vain for a free and unembarrassed address. All stood silent.

"Oh, dear!" said Lady Charlotte "I, shall have to behave like the child's book; I mean like the story; that is, like the old woman in the story, where the stick begins to beat the dog; and the dog begins to bite the rope — and — oh, dear! I can't remember how it goes on: but Gertrude will remember it all; she used to say it by heart when she was a little child. I know, however, that all was set a-going that they might get home, you know, as we must!"

"Pig won't get over the style, and I shan't get home to-night," —

that is the nursery rhyme."

The girlish giggle with which she repeated the verse, and the twirl she gave to the long ringlet, and all the little shades of ridicule that attached to all she said and did, were rather a relief than otherwise in the embarrassment of the moment. Kenneth laughed, and, leaning heavily on his uncle's arm, made way for her to pass him. He even held out his hand to Gertrude, pressed hers, and then retreating a step backwards, muttered, "I don't feel well; I should like to return to the carriage."

Not a word did he speak during the drive homewards, and Sir Douglas forbore to chafe his spirit by any attempt at conversation. But each was aware of a shadow that fell over all objects as they drove along; and the few words spoken at parting were spoken with constraint, although on Sir Douglas's part they were only a promise to see him in the morning, and on Kenneth's "Very well; yes; good-bye for the present."

Then came again, for Sir Douglas, the mingled pain and pleasure of his quiet, loving evening at the Villa Mandorlo. Lorimer Boyd was sitting with Gertrude when he came in. They were looking over maps in a small atlas that lay on the table.

"Are you teaching Gertrude geography?" asked Sir Douglas with a smile.

"I should want many lessons, I am afraid," answered she, shutting the book hurriedly; "but Mr. Boyd would have plenty of patience with me."

They chatted a while together, and then Lorimer Boyd took his leave. Lady Charlotte lay drowsily reading a little French novel on a sofa in the distance. Sir Douglas and his betrothed talked of Scotland: of his home; of the past; of the future; of wood-walks and mountain-walks which

they were to take together; of all the good she was to do; and all the happiness she was to confer. All of a sudden, and, as it seemed to the startled girl, quite unaccountably in the midst of a description of Torrieburn Falls, his voice broke, and in a smothered and passionate tone he said, "Oh, Gertrude! my Gertrude! do you know the meaning of your name? It means TRUE—true to your trust! There was a German Gertrude once who clung through good and evil to her husband, and when, for some political offence, he was sentenced to be broken on the wheel, she sat by him through the long night, moistening his lips in the torture of that terrible death, and speaking words of comfort to the last! That was love."

"Do you fear that, if such a fate were possible for you, I should forsake you, Douglas?"

"There are tortures not of the body; of the mind; as difficult to bear."

There was a pause. "You are thinking once more of Kenneth," said Gertrude gently.

"Yes, of Kenneth," he answered eagerly; and eagerly he watched her face, for he thought to himself, "Now she will speak."

But she turned away from his searching gaze, and sighed. Then turning towards him again with a sweet sad look, her eyes fell on his eyes, and she said, rather reproachfully, "I have very little power over you, you rebellious lover; did I not tell you not to dwell on things said by poor Kenneth: that all was delirium?"

All? Was *all* delirium? That was exactly what Sir Douglas panted to know.

And Gertrude, believing that all that disturbed his mind must be a repetition of vague, angry threats; not with any special reference to her, or connected with any confession of love for her, but resulting from a general spirit of rebellion on the part of Kenneth against his uncle; thought she did wisely and well in keeping her secret, and not permitting love for herself to sunder the love of those who had been so linked together; and with both of whom—not with Sir Douglas only—her future life must be connected, if she did her duty by all as she hoped to do.

When Sir Douglas bid her good night she looked wistfully in his face. "Come early to-morrow," she said. "Mamma is not well. Come early to-morrow."

"Yes; as soon as I have seen Kenneth."

He was gone. And yet Gertrude did not retire to rest. Nor did she read or work or occupy herself in any way. Her

mother kissed her languidly, with a little yawn, and a "don't sit up, dear; dream in your bed, if you will dream." But she did not obey the mandate. She sat watching and listening. She opened the glass doors that gave on the terraces; the warm night air breathed like a caress on her cheek and shoulder as she leaned against the trellis work, rich with the perfume of flowers. Presently a hurried step approached from the distance, and Lorimer Boyd returned.

"Have you seen him and talked to him?" whispered Gertrude.

"Yes."

"And how did he take it?"

"Very badly at first; he was wild and menacing and foolish, but sensibly enough at last."

"He agreed?"

"Yes, he agreed. I found great difficulty in convincing him that it really was your wish, and he conditioned with me to bring him back one word from you—one written line as a proof. You are to write, 'Farewell, Kenneth. It is better for you and for me; we are not parting for ever, only for a time.'"

"I will write it directly—only"—she hesitated, "only let him clearly understand that, when we do meet again, I shall be a wife."

"Of course," said Lorimer Boyd hurriedly, and without looking towards her. "Give me the note, and I will return to him."

She took the pen. "I cannot call him Kenneth. I have always called him Mr. Ross. Mamma sometimes has called him by his Christian name, but I have not."

"'Farewell, Kenneth Ross,' then; the main thing at this special time is to soothe him, if you wish him to agree to the plan proposed. Each man has his own distinct way of grieving. Trust me, if you were to write me a farewell in such circumstances, I would care little in what words it was couched. But he is wilful—different."

"Farewell, Kenneth Ross. It is better for you,—for me,"—she hesitated over some mention of Sir Douglas, and wrote "for you,—for me.—for *all*. We are parting only for a time, not for ever. Take care of your health. Yours always most truly—G. S."

"There, give it to him. How can I thank you for all the trouble you take? But I know you think nothing of that, not only for my sake, but the sake of an older friend—Sir Douglas himself."

"Yes; for your sake and his. God bless you; God bless you both, and give you

both what happiness is attainable in this strange unstable world. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered the soft musical voice, and the sweet eyes were lifted to his with a fond, thankful expression. And the good-night words and good-night glance went on with Lorimer Boyd through the lonely pathway, to this final task for that evening by Kenneth's restless side, and into the solitude of his own habitation, where he could commune with his heart and be still. Long he sat; his arms folded across his broad chest; his gaze abstractedly fixed on a litter of torn papers, and books of reference heaped by his writing-table, wrapt in moody contemplation. The taper burning by him on the desk, sank suddenly, and startled him from his reverie. He lit another at the dying flame, and rose to go to his bedroom. As he passed one of the tall mirrors let into the wall, and saw the spectre of himself reflected there with a sudden illumination, his lip curled with a grim smile. "Well," thought he, "Kenneth Ross was an Adonis, if any man could lay claim to the title, and yet"—And so he passed to the shadow of slumber and the land of dreams, whither we cannot follow him.

CHAPTER XV.

SANS ADIEU.

EARLY morning in the Bay of Naples! Have any of my readers seen it? Do they remember it? Can they forget it? Did the seeing of it seem to justify the boastful national saying, "See Naples and then die?" The brightness of land and water; the beauty of outline, and of the vegetation that fills up those outlines; the glitter of white, green, scarlet, purple, and blue; villas and palaces; gay vestments; snowy lateen sails, shooting like sudden smiles across the face of the sea; all the glory of nature that hides, as with a bright screen, dirt, ignorance, poverty, misgovernment, and whatever else is faulty or painful in the condition of that careless people, for whom brave hearts have struggled and suffered, and are yet struggling; but who in their whole nature resemble ill brought-up children more than any other peasantry on the face of the globe. Even in their bursts of daring effort to right themselves politically, this may be seen. Wat Tyler,—the "Idol of the Clowne" as he is styled in old-fashioned accounts of that rebellion,—and William Tell, the hero of Helvetian romance,—rose, with men's hearts, to do

men's work; with a steady purpose, and as far as is possible in ambitious human nature, with a certain abnegation of self in behalf of the general good. But Massaniello's revolt, touching as is his story, was the bringing-out of a school-boy sick of a tyrannical master; tyrannical in his turn, and rebelled against in his turn, by companions yet more reckless and short-sighted than himself.

Even in their daily occupations—their slack uncertain industry, easily interrupted for any show or procession; their careless inattentive gabble; their vehement disputes about trifles, when they should be seriously bent on the business of the hour,—their childishness is maintained. Life, with them, seems a filling up of some irregularly passed holiday,—a holiday that has been too long even for their own comfort, as we often see with children. There is no evidence of reality in what they do. They seem playing at everything. Playing at buying and selling; playing at mending nets; playing at oratory in one corner, and at building or carpenters' work in another. Even the women seem playing at washing, as they chase each other laughingly, come carelessly along, swinging a basket of wet linen between them, passing barefoot over the bright sands, whose moist glassy surface on a sunny day often reflects, as if a mirror, the feet and limbs and colour-vestment of the burden-carriers. Their little nasal songs are the songs of children—monotonous, unfinished, with seldom a much thought and poetry as the one Sir Douglas Ross smiled at this special morning, as he wended his way to Kenneth's home, lingering and looking about him, enjoying the brightness and glory of that careless opening day. The song he paused to listen to, was a corrupted version, very naïvely sung, of a little poem by Tommaso Tassoni; not in the style of the grand sweet poetic line of the ever-wailing Paterach, "Blessed be the time, the season, the hour;" but with a tinge of comic humour in its tenderness.

"My blessing" (so it ran) "on the builder who built that house! My hearty blessing be upon him! many blessings in truth—many! Bless him for building that den out of which you come, and into which go! Bless him for framing that window where I often see your dear face looking out! But above all may he be blest a thousand times over for making that nice staircase, up which I can pass when I want to see you and embrace you."

The singer was a little brown urchin.

young that even in precocious Italy he could scarcely be supposed as yet to have any reason for blessing one architect more than another for enabling him to visit his love! He was perched astride on the keel of an upturned boat; his scarlet cap carelessly held in his hands, which rested on the boat in front of him, as he sat, jockey-fashion, carolling his ditty with eager lungs, like a bird in the morning sun.

Sir Douglas tossed him a small piece of silver, which he caught in his cap with a nod and a merry grin, but without dismounting from his throne on the keel. Beyond him sat a girl, his sister apparently, from the resemblance between them, weeping bitterly, and he leaned back with a wild grace, and made her an offer of the coin; repeating the ever-ready phrase of childhood to those in sorrow—"Weep no more!" But the girl continued sobbing; her breast heaved convulsively in its crimson bodice, and she was vainly staunching, with her stiff little embroidered apron, tears which fell without ceasing from most beautiful eyes—eyes whose lids seemed rather to be fringed with feathers from a bird's wing than furnished with ordinary lashes, so thick and soft lay their shadow on her cheek.

At first Sir Douglas had made a movement to add to his benefaction, but he somehow intuitively felt that here was a sorrow which no amount of silver coin, nor even gold coin, could avail to comfort. He approached the stranded boat, and spoke a few words of compassion and inquiry. The boy slid down from his place, and drew his sister's hands away from her face, that she might attend to the stranger; but, instead of answering, she also slid down, lithe as a branch of broken woodbine, and hastily flitted away over the sands. He could see her, still weeping, repulsing, with a little movement of the shoulder, the attempted consolations of some companions who crossed her path, and turned pityingly towards her; till, spying in the distance the gaunt figure of an old weather-beaten woman, she ran rapidly forwards to meet her, and flung herself into the circling arms. Then both women, as of common accord, dropped down to the sands, and again embracing as they seated themselves, wept in concert.

"E la madre di Giuseppe!" muttered the boy, his own glittering black eyes suffused for a moment with sympathetic tears.

"And where is Giuseppe?"

The boy pointed to the smoke of a steam-packet, trailing quietly on the calm air far out in the bay.

"And is he your brother?"

"No; he was the lover of Nanella."—(this was told in the simplest way in the world)—"and yesterday they were all as happy as possible, sailing in that very boat. And the boy gave a little kick backwards with his bare brown heel on the boat's side, as he stood leaning against it and facing the inquisitive stranger, to impress the situation on Sir Douglas.

Yes! all so happy only yesterday, and Nanella to be married in three days from this time; and now, as the saints and Madonna had permitted, Giuseppe had been tempted by the offers of a "richissimo signor Inglese" to accompany him; had left Nanella and Naples and his mother, and had his head full of dreams of making a fine fortune, and not to be a fisherman any longer.

"But he will return, and then marry your sister, if he has a true heart."

"Ah! signor, but sometimes from the sea one does not return at all, and the hearts, whether false or true, lie deep among the fishes! So Giuseppe's father lay, after a great storm, and therefore the old mother and Nanella weep. For my part" (and the glitter of the Southern smile returned to the boy's mobile countenance)—"for my part, I only envy Giuseppe; it must be a grand thing to sail far, far, far away, and see strange people and ships, and bring home strange birds! Ah! if any great signor—if, for example, your Excellency—would say to me, 'Pope, let us sail away together,' how readily would I say, 'Yes! let us go—andiam, partiam!'" He gave an indolent look towards the sea, and then added, laughing, "It would not at least be my baggage that would detain me! Such *baule* as I saw lifted on the deck of the steamer before she was off! such shouting and scuffling, and tossing about of lights—for she was off at dawn of day, and there was much loading to be done first. I am sure Giuseppe alone lifted thirteen boxes. But I—ah! that would be another affair; I should take a slice of melon in my hand and step on board, and say to the Excellency: '*Eccomi!*'"

"I have a great mind to take you at your word," said Sir Douglas, laughing, as he looked on the little careless lad, who evidently thought it rather a convenience than otherwise to have what our shivering Northern mendicants term "nothing but what he stood upright in." "I have a great mind to take you with me to a very cold country, where I live when I am at home; but we must talk of it another time; the

mother and Nanella would cry still more if you left them."

"Oh no, signor, Nanella would not care. Do take me!"

And he followed Sir Douglas a few steps, as if hoping that his future destiny would be settled then and there, in another sentence or two.

"No, no. I will think of it. Go now — do not follow me. Go and comfort Nanella."

The little fisher-boy shook his head. Then he slowly returned to his boat, and casting himself on the sands was soon engaged in that lively game, the "*gioco del moro*," with companions as little in need of portmantaux and *baule*, to pack their clothes in, as his half-naked self; and quite as ready for any chance start in life; while Sir Douglas quickened his steps to reach the Palazzo on the Chiaia, — musing as he went on the contrasts of sorrow in luxury such as existed there, and sorrow in poverty such as he had just left. Upon the whole, Heaven's visitations are more even than they seem. The golden shields of heroes, embossed and decorated and worked with strange devices, protected life no better than the common soldier's; and the arrows of fate still strike home to the heart, whether the breast lie bare to the sunshine like poor little Pepe's, or be clothed in "purple and fine linen."

Nothing could be more commonplace than these reflections of Sir Douglas's: but they are commonplace because they are universally true; and they absorbed him so entirely that he was still occupied with the immense despair caused by the departure of some obscure and nameless fisherman in the hearts of that girl and woman weeping on the sands, when the last step of the staircase was reached, and he stood on the landing of Kenneth's apartment.

The door of that apartment was wide open; and, as he entered, Sir Douglas was startled by the peculiar aspect of the rooms. Every one knows the look of rooms from which the habitual occupant has just flitted. The torn nest of a bird does not tell its story more clearly. "Packed up and gone away," is written on all the little nameless shreds of litter — the scraps of paper and string, — the chairs standing in unusually irregular positions; the beds unmade because about to be stripped; the doors all ajar, and the odd silence that seems to pervade the place where customary voices sound no longer; all seem dumbly to impress upon us, "Those you seek were here, but they have departed!"

Only a minute or two of bewilderment elapsed before another step sounded on the

bare stone staircase, and the conceited, cigarette-smoking valet, whom Sir Douglas neglected on his first visit to Kenneth, entered, extremely moody and crestfallen.

"Where is your master?" asked Sir Douglas.

"Eh! Chi lo sa!" The young Excellency had asked for the accounts the previous evening; had scarcely looked at them, saying that he had much headache that night; had paid him without a word, and had bid him pack up his things immediately! The first he had thought the young Excellency was again in delirium, but that he missed, and the Signor Boyd, who had tea with the young Excellency, had remarked nothing extraordinary; but bid him go to night as usual after much talk.

That he had accordingly obeyed, and packed all but his Excellency's music, which the Excellency angrily said he did not want, was in fact struck the guitar so passionately that it "burst asunder with a great sound." The after all this, the young Excellency's things were carried down to the port and put on the boats to be carried to one of the big steamers; and that at the very last moment when the valet was preparing also to add his own things, gathered together as he hurried, in most uncomfortable haste, the young Excellency had told him he need give himself no such trouble, for that he intended to take with him Giuseppe the cat diver, who had fished him out of the water the day his Excellency might remember — the day of the accident which was followed by the dreadful illness from which the young Excellency was only just recovered. The Giuseppe had only laughed at the explanation made by him — the valet — and said that he would nurse the Signor *lugaro* as if he was a baby at the breast, and that he did not require any more a valet who was not a courier, nor a courier who was not a sailor. And any more than these particulars he, the valet, could not narrate being "stordito" with all that had occurred and knowing no more than he had had the honour to explain to his Excellency.

Was there no note — no message? Sir Douglas asked. Did Mr. Kenneth Ross mention him before starting?

Not a word. There was indeed a note, but to Mr. Boyd, not to his present Excellency; which he had just delivered, as which appeared to cause much surprise and displeasure to the Signor Boyd, who was leaving the Chancellerie and following him to the apartment.

In a minute or two more, Lorimer B. entered.

"You know something of this. You have a note from him. What does it all mean?" groaned Sir Douglas. "You—is it possible you have known he was going? advised him to go? Where is his note? What does he say? My God, what has driven him to this?"

"My dear Douglas, pray be calm; this graceless creature does things in a way no one but himself could dream of. I admit counselling him to continue his travels—he is now sufficiently recovered."

"Oh no—good Heavens, no!—he was as weak as water yesterday. Oh, Lorimer, who could have thought?"

"He is enduring no fatigue; he is at sea, in an excellent steamer, with a surgeon on board. How could I guess he would depart so, without a word of farewell? I did not expect it this week. I have only this moment received his note."

"What does he say? read me the poor boy's note. Oh God! this is a bitter way of parting!"

"His note, Douglas—his note—is of a piece with all the rest of his conduct to you; forgive me if I say his utterly selfish and ungrateful conduct. Here it is: but be assured whatever your anxious mind may fancy about him, he is not only well enough to start, but a thousand times more likely to recover health and equanimity away from these scenes than by remaining here fretting you and himself, and falling back as soon as recovered into scenes of Neapolitan dissipation and extravagance."

"His note—give me his note."

Lorimer Boyd handed it to his friend with a sigh of mingled impatience and compassion, and Sir Douglas read it.

"MY DEAR BOYD,—I don't find I have much nerve or heart for any more farewelling,—so this is to tell you I am off! Tell my uncle so. Say all that is proper from me to him; and that I am much obliged for all his care and attention during my illness, &c. The fewer words the better. I can't tell him, or you, my plans, because I have not yet made any; but I have taken Giuseppe with me, who speaks Greek, and is a much more spirited and likely sort of fellow than the d—d yawning valet I got saddled with when I first arrived in Naples. He has been to Alexandria, too, and up the Nile, and to Spain, and America, and some place in every point of the compass, if one is to believe him, which I am quite willing to do. You will all hear of me sooner or later. In the meanwhile I am better away. 'Gone on the grand tour,' like the young

gentlemen in old fashioned novels. You may quote, perhaps, your favourite *larmoyant* Petriarch:—

'Lo star mi strugge,—e'l fuggir non m'aita,'
—&c. &c.

But I have been uncomfortable enough lately, to think any change a change for the better! Old Sir Douglas was all for my travelling when I was for staying in England or Scotland; and now I'm all for beginning a vagabond life, and spending a year or two in seeing the world. Who knows but I may be the better for it, and come back as sage as Solon, and infinitely better company? Let us hope so.

"Yours very truly,

"KENNETH ROSS."

"P.S.—Louis, the valet, is paid, and overpaid; so don't let him come down upon Sir Douglas with any pretended claims, except for a character, for which I told him he may refer to you. His accounts were a farce; but he is not a greater rogue than all his *semblables*. One does not expect principle in any of them; only to be knowing in their calling, get one rapidly through the bore of dressing, and be punctual in taking and delivering notes; and I must say I had no reason to complain of this fellow, in any of these particulars. You may say that I commend him.

"K. R."

Sir Douglas dropped the hand which held the note, and sighed bitterly.

"Without a farewell!" he said. "Without one word of farewell!"

"Oh! be reasonable, Douglas. Was he not always the same from boyhood? Was he ever considerate or grateful? Come away from this place. "Come"—(and the words seemed spoken with hesitation) "to the Villa Mandorlo with me. Come."

"Not now—not, now. I must go home first. I am willing to think you acted for the best—but my heart aches to think of my poor wayward lad: ill and gone. Ill! He may have thought I wished him gone. His note is so odd!" and again the dejected eyes ran through the cold and careless lines, as if seeking for something they could not find there.

"I should be sorry if he thought I had desired his absence?"—and Sir Douglas looked up in a questioning manner into Lorimer's face.

Gloomy displeasure was struggling with tenderer feeling on Lorimer's brow. A tinge of scorn was in his voice and manner, as he answered.

"I fear his thinking you desired his absence would only have made him more willing to remain. Douglas, you are a self-tormentor! you were so even as a boy. I will stake my experience of men and things against yours, that in those days your father and brother never suffered one tithe of what you suffered, attributing to them feelings and motives, and vexations and mortifications, which never occurred to them, though they occurred to you, and though most certainly they would have haunted you had you stood in their place. For Heaven's sake, try and put aside your own view of this day's mischance! Kenneth ought not to have done what he has done; he should have gone this day week, after preparing you — after asking your guidance and advice — after bidding you a kindly and grateful farewell. What then? It is not in him! And the very want of natural tenderness that prevented his seeing that this was the natural course for him to pursue, prevents him at this moment from suffering. I would wager any money that he is at this moment — while you are grieving here — lying on the deck in the sunshine, smoking a cigar; recovering from the very slight degree of fatigue that active and capable fellow Giuseppe would have permitted him to endure; enjoying the morning breeze at sea, — and thinking far more of how the change will answer to him than of any of the effects the suddenness of his departure may have upon us. I will call an hour hence at your hotel, and we will walk to Santa Lucia together; or will you come to the Chancellerie?"

"No; I will wait for you at the hotel. I had rather be alone for a little. Alone — even from you, Lorimer."

As he spoke he held out his hand, and the two friends parted. Lorimer Boyd looked sadly, and somewhat sternly, after the tenderer, less resolute man; and Sir Douglas, looking sorrowfully out over the sea, in the direction where the smoke of the vanished steamer had been visible in the earlier morning, repeated to himself in a choked voice — "Without a word of farewell or explanation!"

The little brown fisher-boy was still playing on the sands. Nanella was still sitting, the head drooping, disconsolate and silent, by the side of the older woman, who was spinning from a distaff, from habit, mechanically, with hard set lines of grieving round

her mouth, but without any outward show of emotion.

How little, when he pitied the girl and laughed with the boy that morning, had Sir Douglas imagined their sorrow would be linked with his sorrow, and that the departure of Giuseppe would seem also to him an event disturbing all the tranquillity of that day, and many a day to come, till news could arrive of the wanderer!

CHAPTER XVI.

ALCYONE.

LORIMER BOYD had time before he rejoined Sir Douglas to inform the inhabitants of the Villa Mandorlo of the very sudden departure of Kenneth. The maps which he and Gertrude had been looking at the night before, with a view to sketching out some plan of travel for him, — and allowing him to propose it to his uncle himself, — still lay on the table, with marks of the different routes by land and sea, which Lorimer had thought likeliest to interest him. Gertrude felt quite guilty as she looked at them; as if she had planned not only his departure but the manner of it. Lady Charlotte saw the matter in the serenest light of unmitigated rejoicing. "Dear me! Well, I never expected Mr. Kenneth would have given so little trouble. I thought he would have come here like Beauty and the Beast, — I mean like the beast that was a prince in reality, you know, in that story (for of course we must all allow Mr. Ross himself to be a beauty): I thought he would come moaning and complaining to Gertrude (he certainly was moaning and complaining the day you and he were talking so loud together, my dear); and then afterwards being ill, or pretending to be very ill; which is exactly what the Beast Prince did; if you recollect, Gertrude! Indeed, he pretended to be dying, in a corner of the garden, — to excite pity, you know. Men are so fond of exciting pity; and they are so very obstinate when one can't like them; wonderfully obstinate they are! I remember a Sir John Evans who was in love with my sister; such a red-faced, loud, bull-voiced sort of a man, and he wouldn't give up, though mamma and I told him over and over again it was of no use proposing, and he kept saying in such a voice, — a voice like a trombone at the play, — 'I will make you so happy, my dear!' — and my sister answered so sensibly, 'I don't want to be happy, if you are to

make me so, Sir John; I wish to be happy my own way; and then like the Beast Prince (and like Kenneth Ross), he said he was ill, and was quite broken-hearted; as if a man *could* be broken-hearted who had such a voice, and went about in a dress that looked like an old jockey's! And when he heard she was going to marry somebody else, he swore the most horrid oaths,—and in about a month he came to mamma and told her he also was going to marry somebody else: and in his big voice he said something about hitting the right nail on the head at last, and not wearing the willow; and that he had made the girl's acquaintance at a meet of the hounds on a Thursday, and proposed for her on the Saturday, because it never did to crane when you were going to take a leap! Now what good would it have been to pity him? None at all; and you see he didn't really require it; and I don't pity Kenneth. Surely you ain't going to pity Kenneth?" added she, with a sudden break in her long monologue, seeing her daughter's abstracted eyes, which were fixed on the atlas on the table, gradually filling with tears.

"No, mamma," said Gertrude, smiling through the glittering drops, and wiping them away;—"I was not pitying Mr. Kenneth Ross, but thinking of his uncle. I know this suddenness will vex him; will cut him to the heart."

"Well, now, really, Gertie, interposed Lady Charlotte, with more warmth than usual;—"you will spoil Sir Douglas. You should never spoil men, and you should never pity them, because then they don't care half so much about you. I assure you they don't. And she gave a meditative twirl to the long ringlet; slightly nibbled the end of it, and continued very gravely:—"And I would be particularly cautious about spoiling Sir Douglas, if I were you, because it will make him think himself so very superior,—in fact he is very superior; but then you know he must be very foolish in some little corner of his brain, if he is sorry that Kenneth is gone; when we are all so very glad, and he ought to be glad too. I am sure, as for me, I could dance for joy! I could indeed; only of course Sir Douglas would be shocked; and I don't wish to shock him. Now here he comes, Gertrude; and I do hope you won't be so silly as to seem sorry because there really is nothing to be sorry about."

But Gertrude comprehended better than her garrulous parent, that in spite of the relief of Kenneth's much-desired absence, there *was* something to be sorry about; and

she received Sir Douglas with a degree of sympathetic tenderness which perhaps was the only true balm his wounded heart was at that time capable of receiving.

Then followed days of such peace and close communion that the hearts of both must have been made in strangely different mould from other human beings, if happiness had not predominated in them. And though Gertrude, in the first hours of that anxiety so hard to bear, which had visited Sir Douglas, shared with him the pang and soothed its bitterness,—the natural gladness consequent on relief from constraint, embarrassment, and a certain degree of terror with which Kenneth's wild threats had possessed her, shone out in a little while like sunshine after a storm. Her gladness was new witchery in Sir Douglas's eyes. He had seen her tender, passionate, indignant, comforting; but he had never seen her playful—never in the pretty mood of "girlish spirits;" and, like all men who have led busy lives among grave interests, it was a welcome and a pleasant thing to him: one charm the more where all was already so charming. He was surprised at his own cheerfulness; but even the ever-recurring anxiety about Kenneth could not make him otherwise than cheerful, and the step that Gertrude listened for every day with increasing fervour of welcome, every day came glad and alert to the door of that villa whose architect he could have found it in his heart to bless, even in the words of little brown Pepe's nasal song.

At length they had news of the wanderer. In the midst of their preparations for leaving Naples, a letter arrived, not from Kenneth—whether too angry, or too lazy, or too careless to write—but from the hero of Nanella's heart, the coral-diver, Giuseppe. And in truth not written even by him, for whatever other perfections culminated in that much-lamented lover, he could not write his own love-letters, or indeed write at all, beyond a very curious and elaborate attempt at signing his name.

Few Italians in the lower classes, and few indeed in the middle classes, think it at all incumbent on them to write their own letters. Their most secret thoughts, their most affectionate avowals, their most important business—all these topics for correspondence are given over to the *Scrivano*, or public letter-writer, who may be seen often plying his vocation at the corner of the public street. Diversity of style need not be looked for. The compositions resemble each other nearly as closely as the pattern epistles which are to be found in those old-

fashioned guides to epistolary excellence, "The Complete Letter Writers;" in which works may be found, gravely set down for copying, such letters as the following:—"To a young lady demanding her hand in marriage," "To the same after her acceptance of your suit," "Ditto after rejecting it;" "Ditto to bid her farewell;" "To an amorous gentleman, repulsing his advances;" "To the same, according him a meeting;" "To a merchant trafficking in foreign wares and china;" "To a lady who has lost her husband in the wars," and so on, *ad infinitum*. But at least these published models of how you ought to express your secret sentiments admit of private selection. Not so the aid invoked from the Scriv no; you must inform him *viva voce* of your dearest thoughts, and desire him passionately to implore a return of your love, while he tranquilly listens and takes a pinch of snuff. You must do this too, very often not only in the hearing of the Scriv no (whom, of course, you intend shall hear you), but in the hearing of some *dolce far niente* bystander who pauses to amuse his mind through his ear, without reference to your pleasure; or some eager would-be correspondent who waits discontentedly to say what he has to say till you have finished what *you* have to say, wondering at your passion and your protness, longing to spur you into a more rapid wind-up of your love or your anger, and pouring into the ear of the unmoved Scriv no some totally different subject of thought, before the latter has done sprinkling sand over the moist inky messages of affection you have just paid him to despatch. Some snuffy old poulterer, anxious to know the market price of quails and red-legged partridges by the dozen, nudges away perhaps a young girl whose eyes are full of tears and whose heart is full of sorrow, and in his turn is nudged away by some stalwart youth like Giuseppe, who, cheerily looking out during the time of his brief dictation, pays with a gay smile what the Scriv no may think a proper proportion of the language of love and despair, in a letter in which there is often as little real sadness as there is in the nightingale's song; but to which the living "Complete Letter Writer" gives that conventional turn, without which neither the sender nor the recipient would be contented.

Nor are they contented very easily, to judge by the high-flown phrases which adorn some of these epistles; seeming to prove that the more exaggerated the hyperbole, the better in their opinion is the style.

A young fisherman in Giuseppe's situation, advances and desires the Scriv no at Messina immediately to inform Miss Nanella at Naples that he is, he thanks Heaven, in good health, and hopes she is the same; that his master is in improved health, rich, and liberal. He is sorry to have left her at such short notice; but it was a good chance, and it would have been madness to lose it. He will marry her on his return. At present they travel in foreign lands—to Tunis or to Greece—he knows not where. She is to be cheerful, and embrace his mother, who is in return also to embrace her,—and he remains her own Giuseppe.

From this small egg, the Scriv no will produce the astonishing "Pharaoh's Serpent" of an epistle which the aforesaid Nanella confided to Sir Douglas, with tears of joy and thankfulness, and many clappings and unclappings of her little brown hands, and glad clappings of the same; and on the return of the precious missive, dropped it into her boddice, gave it a final pressure of affection there, and ran lightly away, all smiles, to the equally exultant weather-beaten old mother.

Giuseppe's sentiments were thus rendered:—

"My ever beloved, regretted, and every-moment-of-the-day-and-night-sighed-for Nanella!

"Tears, hot and constantly dropping, almost effaced for me, after we separated, the beloved shores of Naples; and my heart appeared as if about to burst in two; leaving you the one-half, and the other only going with your miserable Giuseppe! Scarcely could I believe it was day, so dark did all things seem around me. The fortune of poverty is to be torn from what it loves, because it is a necessity with the poor to earn! The riches of the English Signor are immense; and so also is his liberality; and for that reason only I adopted with anguish the step of going on board the departing steamer. Do not suppose, my Nanella, that my love can be at all shaken by the great storms which the saints and the Madonna thus permit to try the ever faithful, and at this hour almost completely drowned-in-sorrow heart of your Giuseppe! At my return we will kneel together before the excellent priest, and obtain for our by-me-so-much-longed-for union, the everlasting consent of an approving and overlooking Heaven! The youthful Signor who was ill at Naples is reinvigorated by the much-bestarred clear nights and breeze-adorned-and-refreshed days he has lately passed. His Excellency's plans of travel are still

unsettled. One day he will speak of sailing for Tunis, another day he will hold that it would greatly divert his mind to seek the shores of the country of Greece. Faithful to the duties imposed on me when the Signor Inglesse entered into a convention with me to accompany him, I shall, before the all-seeing eye of a just Providence, and the approbation of the saint whose name I bear, together with the assistance of the angels of succour, continue to travel where the Signor is pleased to appoint.

"Adieu, my Nanella, Nanellina — adieu ! Embrace for me my beloved, worthy, and ever-respected mother, to whom shall be my next letter. Let her also embrace you for me. As many as there are stars out on a great night in summer, so many kisses I deposit on your much-desired cheek ! Keep me in your heart and mind, and give to all asking friends the assurance of my entire health and contentment. Strive also to merit the blessing of Heaven by a cheerful spirit. It will seem to me a thousand years till I see you again, and embrace you in very truth !

"Your GIUSEPPE."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROWNING JOY.

MORE letters (in the same florid style) from the absent Giuseppe, and one or two briefer missives from Kenneth — both to his uncle and to Lorimer Boyd — sufficed to set their minds at rest, at all events as to the health and present well-doing of the wayward object of so much anxiety. He was tolerably thankful for a general settlement of his difficulties, which, without greatly trenching on his future, and with some renewed sacrifice on the part of his uncle, the latter had effected. He was amused and "improved," as he assured them, by his scheme of travel; and the period of his eventual return was left in the vaguest uncertainty, — to Lady Charlotte's intense satisfaction.

Once only he alluded to Gertrude, and then not in the honest earnest manner which Sir Douglas would have given words to read; but with a flippant affectation of carelessness that wounded more than if her name had never been mentioned.

"Remember me," he said, "to the Skiftons; lay me at the feet of my aunt that is to be. If I find in my travels some 'pearl of price,' I shall garner it up as a wedding gift. Meanwhile my best wishes are here,

for her future health and prosperity. If you let me know the day of the happy event, I will

"'tak' a stoup o' kindness yet,"

and drink everybody's good health. I am always glad, as you know, of an opportunity of health-drinking, and believe it to be much more conducive to my own health than water-drinking Mr. Boyd or temperate Uncle Douglas choose to admit."

Sir Douglas sighed as he read the careless lines; but his sighs were checked by the spirit of contentment which pervaded his days. "Full measure, pressed down, and running over," seemed the sum of his happiness. The more he saw of Gertrude the more he loved her; the more he rejoiced in the blessed good fortune that had made her return his love; the more he blest the sweet eyes that were to shine over his future, and light the lovely but lonely walks and halls of Glenrossie Castle.

Their parting was near; their first parting since they had agreed to be united forever; their last parting till the time when that union should be made sure by the solemn ceremony that was to pronounce them one "till death do us part."

Death — only death !

Sir Douglas was to go to Scotland, to Glenrossie, to give directions, to settle much that needed arrangement previous to bringing there the new lady of the castle. And Lady Charlotte was to go to London, to see many old friends (and some new ones), who rather grudged her the success of her chaperonage during her somewhat forlorn widowhood; for they had heard that Gertrude Skifton — "who, after all, was no such great beauty" — had captivated one of the richest of the Scotch baronets, though she had failed with the Prince Colonna; and they thought the "poor silly creature" who had married the nameless Skifton had had a success somewhat beyond her deserts. Several young ladies of the highest lineage and most unimpeachable beauty had been "going about" in the very best society for several seasons without any such desirable result; and, altogether, the sudden arrival of their old friend, with a ready-made stock of happiness and wealth for a daughter of Mr. Skifton, "deceased," whom they had never made up their mind to patronise, and who now obviously did not require their patronising, showed rather in the light of a grievance than as a subject of congratulation.

The excessive simplicity, too, of Gertrude

did not suit them. The real, natural, unaffected, innocent independence of her manner, anxious for nothing, resenting nothing, did not please them. Some said she was haughty; and some that she was dowdy; and some that "she seemed to be as great a fool as her mother."

The stately, handsome, mature bridegroom was also the subject of captious remark. Some laughed at the wily widow "catching" him for her daughter. Some thought that really the girl was not amiss, and might have done better than marry a man twice her age. Some affected to be mightily amused and tickled at the story of Old Sir Douglas going out to Italy to lecture his scapegrace nephew, and being caught in the toils himself, and brought home captive. Some said he had "behaved abominably to the young man; persuaded the mother to reject his suit, and then made love to the daughter on his own account." Some were of opinion that the mother and daughter were two intriguantes, who had thrown over the nephew when they found they could entrap the uncle, and, "wheedled" a confirmed old bachelor till they brought him to the point of matrimony.

When was there ever a marriage arranged, which bitter tongues did not slur,—and idle tongues canvass,—and envious tongues find fault with,—and careless tongues discuss? Proving only in the slurring, canvassing, fault-finding, and discussing, the great mystery of preference; and the impossibility of common-place understandings being brought to feel that such preference is God's inspiration, and not a scheme of man's making,—ruled like a map or an account-book,—with the set boundaries of the one, or the apportioned valuing of the other to regulate the result.

"Why did she love him? Curious fool, be still: Is human love the growth of human will?"

No—nor of human comprehension. Those who love would fain escape, it may be, from the thrall. Those who do *not* love would give the world to be able to bend and bow their hearts and imaginations to the choice that would "answer" in all respects,—the choice that would do them credit,—that would promote their worldly advancement,—that would satisfy friends and prudence, and their own predetermined rules.

It cannot be! Love steps in, with a smiling mastery, and waves the magic wand which makes them tremble and obey! Love—the great magician—by the light of whose lamp palaces arise brighter than

Aladdin's, and voices sound in the air, whose luring from commonplace things may end in wrecking us; but sweet are the hours first passed, sailing with the tide, down the rapid river of unreturning time!

Gertrude was sailing down that stream; lit by the warm sunshine of joy, and lulled by the music of its rippling waves.

Lady Charlotte was made a little restless and unhappy: both by the ironical jealousies we have alluded to, the great desire she had to collect together all sorts of titled relations and guests,—and the extreme reluctance of the bridegroom to be made "a public spectacle," as he termed it; a reluctance which Gertrude seemed fully to share,—and to yield only from love of her mother, to the desire of the latter, for the pomp and ceremonies of the nuptial day.

The day came, and the guests. That agitated and agitating vision of bridal vestments, murmuring replies at the altar, blushing bridesmaids, and a veiled bride; the sobbing kiss, the hurried departure, the cheers of the mob gathered round the doors, and the blank silence afterwards, in spite of crowds and tumultuous chattering,—which mark the progress of "the Wedding Day," were all gone through,—as they have been gone through a thousand times, and will be gone through a thousand and a thousand times more. And before Lady Charlotte's weak, vain, loving heart had recovered from its agitation, "Sir Douglas and Lady Ross" were off on their way to Glenrossie.

On their way to Glenrossie! Ah! what other rapture, what other fulness of joy, shall compare to the day when the woman, who loves deeply and truly, is borne on to the home of the man she so loves?

For ever! the human "for ever;" the for ever "till death do us part;" how it stretches out its illimitable future of joy, as we sit, hand linked in hand, sure of each other, of existence, of love, of all that makes a paradise of earth; and the hedges and boundaries that divide lands, flee past before our dreaming eyes; and the morning sun glows into noon; and the noon burns and fades; and the day sinks again, with a crimson haze, into sunset—and perhaps the sweet and quiet light—the pale light of the moon—swims up into that sea of blue men call the sky; while still we are journeying on to the one spot on earth where we have cast our anchor of hope; to the trees and lawns, and rocks and hills, and gardens of flowers, and paths of delight, which ~~will~~ ^{are} till now all ~~his~~ ^{ours}: and are since the morning ~~ours~~ ^{ours}!—the place we have loved without ever seeing it, perhaps,—the place that

aw his boyhood, where his people drew
reath; where his dear ones have lived and
lied; where *we* hope to live and die—
Home! The blessed word—HOME!

So, in the shadows and lights of one of
the sweetest nights of English summer, Sir
Douglas Ross and Gertrude journeyed on;
o, in the clear moonlight of the advanced
ours, they drove through the solemn dark-
ned approach, scented with the aromatic
dour of the pine-trees; and so, ending at
st the journey, Sir Douglas turned to his

new-made bride, before the bustle of en-
trance and welcome—the barking of dogs,
the ringing of bells, the flutter and hurry
of welcome and reception—should break
in on their silent dream of joy; and pas-
sionately kissing her cheek, murmured softly
in her ear as he led her in, “God bless this
day to both of us! May you be happy here,
my Gertrude, and never regret the day
that made you mine for ever!”

For ever!

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARADISE.

GLENROSSIE was Paradise. For many and many a day after Gertrude had crossed the threshold of that stately castle, she firmly believed that no other home so perfect had ever opened upon bridal eyes. The extraordinary beauty of that wild scenery; blue lake, brown mountain, and wild foaming stream ending in abrupt waterfalls; the stately growth of the incense-breathing old pine trees; the ceaseless change of prospect from different mountain paths; the glad welcome of the old tenantry to "the lady" of their long absent master; the delicious power of helping; of visiting the poor, and blind, and sick, and bedridden, and being able to alter their degrees of suffering, and act as an inferior Providence in favour of those obscure and uncared-for destinies; with the sunshine of love and approval over all she said, did, or planned, from the enamoured Sir Douglas;—left nothing to desire of happiness in Gertrude's heart.

And then, very slowly, very quietly, very unexpectedly, and yet very clearly, she awoke to the perception that in her Paradise there was a snake. Not a great magnificent satanic snake. Not a serpent with a cherub's head, as in the old pictures; coiling round the smooth stemmed trees, glittering and rippling with a river-like movement in its gliding body and varnished skin. Not a python of strange majesty and power, disputing the sense of Heaven's clear revelations, undermining the authority of its ordinances, by words of seeming wisdom,—voluble and sweet as those dim oracles which the priesthood of Apollo sent through metal tubes to make the heathen altars seem divine. Not a creature that awed and yet fascinated, whose presence was a mystery, and its counsel almost a scornful command; but a little sliding, slithering, mean, small, snake: a "snake in the grass": a snake whose tiny bite the heel might almost carelessly spurn when it seemed to pursue, and whose power to wound might be doubted and smiled over till the miracle of death by its venom were irrevocably proved. A snake that looked like a harmless elf. Nothing but the instinctive repulsion which exists in certain natures to reptiles, even when unseen, their presence being discoverable to the inner soul of feeling, though not to the outward sense, could have inspired Gertrude with the aversion she gradually felt for Sir Douglas's half-sister, Alice Ross.

Alice had not offended the bride; on the contrary she flattered her; she obviously endeavoured to please, to wind round her, to become necessary to her. She went beyond the mere yielding up gracefully the small delegated authority which for many years she had seemed to exercise, from being "the only one of the family resident at the Castle." She was not satisfied with dropping to the condition of friend and equal; she rather assumed that of poor relation and humble companion. She chose toleration, and repudiated welcome. As to the near connexion between herself and Sir Douglas, she always alluded to it in a humble, half-mournful, apologetic manner, as if it were a fault, but not *her* fault; and yet a fault for which she was willing to make amends to the extent of her feeble powers. She behaved towards him as towards one who was to be admired, revered, wondered at;—but to love him would be taking too great a liberty. Still, in her own subservient way she contrived to impress him with a notion of humble worship: and she lost no opportunity of increasing that impression even while she deprecated all evidences of its ruling spirit in her mind.

The very first evening they were all seated at the oaken table, where books, and flowers, and carpet-work lay in crowded companionship, she softly gathered together, with a little trembling sigh, a sort of select harvest from among the books, saying, with the slow Highland drawl peculiar to some Scotch voices, "I should have moved these before; for I count them as my very own; but they have lain here so long! Of course I know nothing of military matters, even now; but I have made quite a collection of books, about armour, and about forces in different countries, and fortifications of various kinds—and histories of battles! I have a pedlar's pack of them: Gustavus of Sweden, with no end of plates; and I have even got,—you will laugh,—I have even got a great big volume called the 'Tactics of Elian;' showing all the modes of disposing armies in the Greek and Roman days."

"The Tactics of Elian! What upon earth were they?" said Gertrude, laughing.

"Well, I cannot explain it better than I have done in my simple way. The book shows how they led armies into the field, and how they placed their troops. I have been so accustomed to think of a soldier's life in all ways" (and here she looked deprecatingly towards Sir Douglas), "that no book about it seemed dull to me, and I found very curious things. Such cruel

things! Think of instructions how to take a fort in two several ways; one way if you are obliged to consider the lives of your men (how many of them are killed, in fact); and another way if you 'can afford to expend men;' yes, that is the exact expression; I remember it; it shocked me to think of the calculation. A cruel life, but a brave life," and again she looked at her half-brother, who was smiling with an amused expression, as she slowly delivered her little oration.

"And have you studied these military grammars, so that you could undertake these tasks?"

"Yes, I think I could take a fort," she answered, in a grave deliberate unconscious manner.

"And a bridge?"

"Yes—a bridge. And I could construct a pontoon,—and move troops across the marshes." (Which she pronounced *mair-shes*.)

"What a pity you were not born a generation earlier, Alice, and that your abilities were not employed in the disastrous retreat from Walcheren!"

"Well, I just forbode that you would laugh at me," she said, with the same placid drawl; "and so I do not mind, and I'll carry away my books, and put them in the shelves of the Tower room. I've never changed my room, you know: perhaps I should change it now? If Lady Ross thinks—when she goes over the castle"—and here she made one of her faces of humble deprecating inquiry, and paused.

"Oh! dear no," said Gertrude, eagerly: and "Oh! no, no," broke in Sir Douglas with equal warmth. "You've lived there all your life; I should be sorry indeed, if now,"—

"And I should be sorry," said Gertrude, with a kindly smile, "that my coming should have such a disagreeable result. I hope, unless the day should come when you would leave us and the Tower room, for some *very* pleasant reason, that it will be home, as it has always been."

A glance, sharper than at all agreed with the drawing quiet voice, shot from Alice's grey eyes; a glance of doubtful inquiry; and then she demurely replied:—

"It is not very probable, after so many years, that I should have the reason for leaving which you think so pleasant, Lady Ross."

The bride was young and quick of feeling, and she looked down and blushed very red; for she did not know how to get over her little difficulty. She knew that when she

spoke, with her sweet cordial smile, of some "very pleasant reason" for leaving, she meant, if Alice went away to be married, and she comprehended that her new sister-in-law had doubted whether she meant this speech in all sincerity; since Alice was certainly what, in common parlance, is called even when the party still retains claims to personal attraction, "an old maid."

Alice *did* retain claims to personal attraction: her well-shaped head,—though its banded hair was of that disagreeable dry drab colour, which had not yet the advantage of our modern fashion of being dyed of a golden red,—surmounted a long slender white throat; and a figure which, if somewhat too spare for artistic notions of beauty, was, as her maid expressed it, "jimp and genteel." She moved (as she spoke) with slow precision; and not without some degree of grace. The only positively disagreeable thing about her, was a certain watchfulness, which disturbed and fascinated you. Do what you would, Alice's eyes were on you. You felt them fixed on your shoulder; your forehead; the back of your head; your hands; your feet; the sheet of paper on which you were writing a letter; the title and outside cover of the book you were reading; the harmless list you were making out of your day's shopping; the anxious calculation of your year's income; and the little vague sketch you scribbled while your mind was occupied about other things. I have spoken of her as the snake in this Paradise; but there was something essentially *feline* also in her whole manner; and indeed the cat is, among animals, what the snake is among a lower order of creatures. The noiseless, cautious, circuitous mode in which she made her way across a room was cat-like; the dazed quiet of her eyes on common occasions, had the expression of a cat sitting in the sun; and the startling illumination of watchful attention in them at other times, recalled to our fancy the same creature catching sight of its prey. Even the low purring, and rubbing of pussy's soft fur against your side, seemed to find its analogy, in her slow soft words of flattery; and the gentle approach which neither required nor even accepted any returning caress, resembled the gliding to and fro, on some familiar hearth, of that unlovely little domestic animal, whose cry is alien and weird to our ears, and its shape like a diminished tiger.

Above all in her gravity and changelessness, she was cat-like.

The dog (our other household inmate,) has

his variety of moods like his master. He is joyous, eager, sulky, angry, restless, conscious of our love or displeasure; capable of correction, able to learn; has his own preferences too; welcoming some of the habitual visitors to his master's house, growling at others, he only knows why. He loves the children of the house; he submits to have baby's awkward helpless fat fingers thrust in his eye, without resentment. He romps with the boys, and with his own species, affecting the fiercest onslaughts, and mumbling with a mouth like velvet, when the mimic war leaves him victor in the play! He is a creature made up of variety. But a cat is *always the same*. Equally on her guard with friend and foe—stealthy, indifferent, unsympathizing—as willing to gnaw the babe in its cradle as the rat in the barn; and gliding away to attend to her own private interests, let what will be the event of the hour in the household circle of which she forms part. She is a daily mystery, and a nightly annoyance. In the midst of our tame city-life she is *fera natura*. We advertise our dogs as “Lost, or stolen,” but we say of our cat that she is “gone away.”

Even in going away she consults her own convenience; she does not stay, like the dog, because she is ours, and because we are there, but only so long as she is comfortable.

Alice Ross was “comfortable” at Glenrossie, and she wished to stay. She saw with curiosity and attention the conscious blush of the young wife, when she had alluded to the chance of her leaving the castle for a “pleasant reason.” She herself was not the least embarrassed; she was merely watchful. She was guessing at her new relative's disposition. She finished reaping her little harvest of books, and said her maid would fetch them.

“And when they are sorted, Lady Ross, and all on the shelves, you'll may be look in to my lonely den, in the Tower room, and have a gay good laugh at the fittings there; for the walls will match the books for soldiering. There are prints of most of the notable heroes of modern wars, and there's one, the best of all, that I spent a golden piece or two getting framed, and I'll leave you to guess who *that* will be.”

And the upward glance and grave smile were again directed to her tall half-brother, who had risen from his seat and was turning over the leaves of one of the “military grammars” with some interest. He was rather touched too at the mention of the “lonely den,” and he gave a little friendly tap to the pale cheeks of his half-sister, say-

ing gaily, “Well, this hero will come and see your other heroes to-morrow, and I will Gertrude.”

The little tap on the cheek was more or less pleasant to Alice; but it woke no dimpling smile, or tender answering look.

“I would like very much to show them all to Lady Ross,” she said, quietly.

For one wavering moment Gertrude seemed about to speak. She too was touched at the solitary picture of life in the “lonely den;” she thought of saying something kind to her new sister-in-law.

“Call me Gertrude; do not call me Lady Ross,” was the sentence that rose to her young lips. But there was a brief space of chill silence, no one could say why; and the words remained unspoken.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALICE ROSS.

ALICE was the first to break that silence. “And how did you leave Kenneth?” she said; “and when will he be coming to Torriburn? His feckless mother's been a great distress about him, by what I hear.”

“Kenneth's better,” shortly answered Sir Douglas, as he bent again over a book of military plans: and his handsome brow visibly clouded over.

The illuminated pussy-cat eyes had been amonds in them for a second or two. Alice listened, and looked first at Sir Douglas and then at Gertrude, who had followed up her husband's assurance with the words—

“Oh! yes, better; so much better; quite well; only not strong yet.”

The words were nothing; only the manner, the hurried embarrassed manner, and the blush, another blush, deeper than the one which had betrayed her consciousness that Alice doubted over “the pleasant reason” speech.

What had happened?

Had Kenneth done something extremely wrong and disgraceful? something of which the whole family were to be ashamed of, and ashamed by, as soon as it was known?

Alice thought that quite possible. She knew a great deal of hard gossip about her young nephew, though she had steadily refused to have anything to do with his mother or to visit her or admit her to the “lonely den.”

That tabooed female might call her “Mrs. Ross Heaton of Torriburn,” or any other name she pleased, now she was again married “more decently,” but it

Miss Alice Ross she remained, and was destined to remain for ever "Maggie of the Mill."

Certainly her son Kenneth was very likely to have done something disgraceful.

Or had he merely done something so outrageously extravagant that his uncle had quarrelled with him? Involved himself past retrieval? ruined himself, in fact, at the very outset of his career?

Alice resolved to go the very next day and make a visit far over the hills, and "ayont the Falls," to that Dowager Countess of Clochnaben, who in the opening pages of this history was already a Dowager Countess, though a young widow, and mother to the sickly Earl of Clochnaben and to Lorimer Boyd.

The sickly Earl was still sickly, and still alive; and to say truth Alice Ross had wasted many a year in endeavouring so to compass her ends, that she might become head-nurse in that establishment by marrying the invalid. But the Dowager-widow was too wary for such a plan to succeed; and, without absolutely "cutting" Miss Ross at any period of their long acquaintance, she so plainly held her aloof when her intentions became visible, and so continually frustrated the cleverest little plots, that Alice became weary of the struggle and patient perforce.

The Dowager was now a very old woman; the Earl not a bit nearer death apparently than in his weakly adolescence; and the two women continued friends, though the elder had well-founded suspicions that the younger cherished an idea of succeeding by inheritance to the coveted post, and so ingratiate herself with Lord Clochnaben that he would need her when his mother came to die — and needing her, would marry her *then*.

If it had ever occurred to the Earl of Clochnaben that he would be made more comfortable by having a wife, and that wife Miss Ross, he certainly would have proposed, for he thought of nothing but his own comfort. But it did not occur to him. He did not want to be beloved, he wanted to be attended to; and he had already all the attention he could desire: he did not want to be amused; he was not amusable. He wanted his three draughts a day poured out for him, and his pills brought to him at night. All which had been done, and continued to be done, by his mother's maid, from his boyhood to the present hour.

And so the years rolled on! "While there is life there is hope," and Alice was of a persevering nature. She paid her patient visits to the dull old house and its in-

mates, and sat at home the days that the Dowager had intimated that "if it was fine" she would drive to Glenrossie; she walked by the side of Lord Clochnaben's garden-chair, and she played cards with him on week days; and heard texts expounded, with long wandering "discourses" and longer wandering prayers, from Lady Clochnaben's favourite "meenister" on Sundays. It was a curiously dull life, but it suited Alice. Her mother's few friends had formerly sent for her occasionally for gaieties in Edinburgh, Perth hunts, and county balls; and she had partaken of these moderate pleasures in her own tranquil and reserved manner; neither feeling nor expressing any particular gratitude to those who had invited her; never showing the least glimmer of desire to stay a day beyond the time first appointed; nor knitting intimacies, and promising that eager correspondence which girls so frequently indulge in, with any of her own sex and age, whom she might fall in with on these occasions.

People got rather tired of inviting Alice Ross; and the summonses to assist at gaieties became few and far between. She was not one of your "useful" young ladies. She never played quadrilles or waltzes for a stand-up impromptu dance in a gay party of bright juniors; gracefully shelving herself as an elderly and fading virgin. She knitted no warm slippers for gouty old gentlemen or chilly dowagers. Her care was confined to keeping her own little toes warm. She never "sat back" in anybody's carriage in her life. She always "declined to drive" on such occasions — lamenting, with a grave smile, that she was not "as robust as some folk," to whom it was indifferent which side they occupied in a barouche. She never pronounced the agreeable sentence, "Oh! but let me fetch it; I am just going up stairs," to some lady oblivious of her work-box or carpet canvass. Of the three conjugations, active, passive, and neuter, she understood only the two latter!

In the apparent decline of the little popularity she had once enjoyed, she showed neither resentment nor regret. It seemed all one to her whether she were invited or left out: whether her mother's old friends died off, or forgot her; or, from any overwhelming grief, were unable, as formerly, to send for her to form part of their home circle. She had a most discouraging way of receiving news of such persons, replying to her interlocutors by the two monosyllables of "Yes," and "Oh," the "Yes" being

slightly interrogative, and the "Oh," a calm assent, not an exclamation. As thus:

"You have heard, dear Miss Ross, of your cousin Dalrymple's misfortune?"

"No."

"Well, he was persuaded to enter into that speculation of Indian railways lately planned, so Lady Miller told me."

"Yes?"

"And he is completely ruined! His eldest girl is going out as a governess."

"Oh."

"Lady Miller told me, too, the horrid story of the death of Mrs. Fraser's two little girls, by burning, long ago, you know, when Clochnaben was a boy."

"Yes?"

"There was a Christmas party in the house, and the nurses went down to see the company, leaving a candle near the little beds, and the curtains caught fire in the draught of the door, which had been left ajar; and the poor children's cries weren't heard because of the music down stairs, and when found they were quite dead—suffocated."

"Oh."

Let it not be supposed, however, from this undemonstrative style of conversation, that Alice Ross was in very truth indifferent to the course of events. In all that touched *herself* she was keen, far-sighted, and long-remembering. She never forgot an injury. She never omitted an opportunity.

Her cat-like resemblance extended to the order and method of her every-day life. In the open daylight of social intercourse, she was tranquil and unobtrusive, or purring and courteous; but in the darkness of solitary hours—in the lone den—her mind prowled and capered, and took its light leaps in pursuit of prey. There the dazed eyes resumed their brilliant watchfulness, and gleamed over the gloom of her destiny. There the many calculations for small and great ends were methodically arranged, and plans laid for besieging, undermining, and beleaguering, such as find no place in military books. The tactics of Elian were nothing in comparison with the tactics of Alice.

Not that she was always successful. There is such a thing as being *too* cautious, too calculating; in common parlance, "*too clever by half*."

Those who have settled and secret motives for all that they say and do, are apt to ascribe the same amount of motive to others; and to found their strategy upon a state of things which does not exist. Some-

times therefore she over-reached herself, and was *déroutée* by the very simplicity of those with whom she had to deal. The ground she had to march over at such times, afforded no cover for sharp shooting or ambuscade.

Still she studied unremittingly; and endeavoured to master the peculiarities and varieties of character, very different from her own. Her half-brother had been one of her earliest studies. Almost as soon as she could think at all, she thought about him. That shy, impressionable, passionate, generous nature seemed revealed to her understanding, though in matters of feeling they had no link in common. She had a great opinion of his power to charm, though she scarcely knew why. For a great number of years she had continually expected him to marry; then came a phase of time when she entirely rid her mind of any such disagreeable expectation, and then, as life faded away, and the "pleasant reason" for leaving her own lonely den did not occur, she grew to hope such an event was out of the question! She had "kept house" for Sir Douglas during his intervals of home residence. Now all that was over. There sat the sunny-haired, dove-eyed contrast to herself, enthroned and idolized.

Alice did not like it.

CHAPTER XX.

LADY CLOCHNABEN.

THE morning after her display of military books, she rose early, and, putting on her short, well-fitting riding habit, she rode her Highland pony across the hills to Clochnaben.

As it was no part of Alice's tactics to be frank, she did not begin with the real purpose of her visit, namely, to discover anything Lorimer Boyd might have written about Kenneth; but affected to have made her early expedition in order to inform her dear Lady Clochnaben that the bride was now arrived and settled at Glenrossie.

She drawled forth this news, and the impression made on her by the bride, slowly and quietly, without apparent eagerness or interest. The Countess of Clochnaben was standing with her hands behind her, superintending the planting of some trees, when Alice alighted from her pony. She was so tall, and stood so firmly, that you might think she herself had been planted in the ground; and so thoroughly well planted, that no storm would avail to uproot her. She

had been in youth what is termed a "fine woman;" very stately; but the worst of immeasurably stately women is, that, in old age, they are apt to become gaunt. The Countess of Clochnaben *had* become gaunt. She was also very severe in her opinion of others; gaunt in mind as well as body. She kept very early hours. The iron vibration of the rusty old clock in the courtyard very seldom had the advantage of her in getting the hours of six in summer and seven in winter struck fairly through, before her stern tread was heard on the outer staircase. These morning hours being often chill, and the gusty mountain-gaps full of what Shakspeare calls "an eager and a nipping air," she habitually wore over her cap, as a shield against rheumatic headache, a small quilted black silk bonnet; and when she headed her breakfast-table, what with this peculiarity of costume, the rigid and erect carriage of her tall body, and the prepared severity of her mouth, she looked like a venerable judge about to pass sentence on a criminal. And, indeed, she was continually passing sentence on criminals. Most of her neighbours and connexions were criminals in her eyes; and she spent her time in reviewing their conduct with much asperity. The late Lord Justice Clerk of Scotland told a friend that with respect to *females* brought before him for crime, he was "generally inclined to believe in their guilt." Whether he held the strict opinion of the Roman Cæsar, that it was a fault in a woman even to be accused or suspected, he did not explain. Neither did Lady Clochnaben explain the grounds of her decisions; but it is certain that she generally concluded on the guilt of all females (and most males) whom she summoned for judgment into the Court Session held in her own mind.

She was wont to say grimly, in speaking of any plan proposed to her by persons she thought incompetent, "I give it my determined opposition,"—and it was on these occasions that her factor—nominally (very nominally), "factor to the Earl of Clochnaben"—used to observe that she was "an awfu' woman to contravene." She herself bore out the factor's assertion. She never made use of that common phrase, "That is my opinion." She heard the opinion of others; mowed it down with an absolute reversal; and after setting her thin lips with a sort of preface of negation, said, in a hard distinct voice, "That's my *dictum*." All her opinions were "*dictums*," and all her "*dictums*" were laws.

She was, as I have already observed, very severe on her neighbours. She said she had

an "abhorrence" of sin, and no doubt she had; and she pronounced two "*dictums*," or *dictas*, that greatly troubled Kenneth's tutor step-father, who was inclined to be liberal in these matters. The first of these was, "Don't talk to me of temptation; temptations are just simply the sauce the devil serves up fools with." And the second, "God's mercy is a great encouragement to obstinate offenders."

Indeed, offenders of all kinds, obstinate or repentant, found no favour in her eyes. Heaven might pardon them but Lady Clochnaben could not.

She had a sort of gleam of indulgence for the invalided Clochnaben. He was not "a sinner," but a "poor creature." She was not exactly fond of him; because, as the same shrewd factor who considered her an awfu' woman to contravene observed—"There were two words which were not to be found in her leddysihp's vocabulary; '*fond*,' and '*give*.'" She was both fierce and paragonious. But what little milk of human kindness there was in her rugged nature, and what narrow notions of sacrifice either of her own time or personal comfort, existed there,—existed for the behoof and benefit of Clochnaben. Once, indeed, she had been betrayed into a burst of something almost like maternal tenderness. When Mrs. Fraser's two little girls were burnt, Clochnaben (a very timid helpless lad) had fled from the scene, and, for a brief space, it was thought he too might have perished. He was found, however, crouched in the garden, and brought back to the house. When his mother beheld him safe and unsinged, in the gladness of her surprise she caught him to her breast with a hearty embrace. But immediately afterwards, recollecting the needless terror and anxiety she had endured on his account, she thrust him from her with one vigorous hand, just far enough to administer with the other a remarkably well-directed pugilistic blow in the pit of the stomach; exclaiming, "That will teach you not to trifle with my feelings another time." She did not permit any of her feelings to be trifled with. She had watched Alice Ross's attempt to marry him with more displeasure than fear. She did not choose that he should marry. She gave all such schemes "her determined opposition." She always looked beyond the frail life of her eldest son to Lorimer Boyd. Lorimer was to marry. Clochnaben was to die single. She looked upon him as a sort of *locum tenens*, and temporary representative of the family, the future fortunes of which were to be in the hands of his brother, after he should be

quietly reposing in the family vault. She was extremely proud of Lorimer. She had the poems which he published as a young collegian bound in scarlet morocco and laid conspicuously on the table in the great sitting-room, — a room hung round with the hard portraits of his ancestors; and boasted a good deal of his abilities to her few intimate friends.

She had often boasted of her son Lorimer to Alice Ross; and now, when that astute little personage in the grey riding-habit had made her announcement of the arrival of young Lady Ross, an impatient sigh, and a "glowering" look told at once that neither the bride nor the subject was particularly welcome.

In truth, if Lady Clochnaben could have given this marriage her "determined opposition," she would have done so with quite as much vigour as the reader of the tactics of Elian. Her woman's instinct told her, hard woman though she was, that Lorimer Boyd had taken an interest in Gertrude Skifton beyond what he chose to admit. It was not for nothing, she thought that after mentioning the Skiftons in every letter he wrote, quoting them, praising them, delighting in them, — he suddenly "kept silence even from good words," and after once or twice mentioning in a gloomy and constrained way the parties they were making with Sir Douglas and Kenneth at Naples, ceased altogether to comment on their existence.

Lady Clochnaben was of opinion that Lorimer "had thought of the girl for himself;" and though she probably would have considered such a match, — in spite of Gertrude's fortune and good connexion on her mother's side, — not nearly good enough for the condescension of her consent, — still she resented the chance being taken out of her power, and her favorite son being, as she shrewdly suspected, wounded and disappointed.

They were cousins, too, by a sort of distant Scotch cousinhood, the Clochnabens and Lady Charlotte Skifton: and, though they repudiated all knowledge of the Skifton element in the family, they considered Lady Charlotte to be bound to them by that inextricable tie.

Lady Clochnaben had no motive for reserve, and she abused the young Lady Ross in round set terms; though she did not know her. She sneered a good deal at Sir Douglas. She hoped the marriage *might* turn out well, but that sort of marriage very seldom succeeded. She condescended to say she would come over to the castle, "though the bride little deserved such at-

tention," and that Clochnaben would come also: that was enough.

Then she entered on a branch of the subject most eagerly listened to by Alice: the gossip that had percolated through various channels respecting Kenneth's admiration for Gertrude, and how his uncle had cut him out, and what a worthless sinner Kenneth was. And old Lady Clochnaben gave a jocose little shake to the black quilled bonnet, with a grotesque attempt at gaiety, for she thought it a good joke that Kenneth should be ousted and outwitted, though she thought it no joke at all that her son Lorimer should lose his chance of winning the same prize.

And all being said that could be said in croaking dispraise of the new-married couple, the black-capped judge proceeded to the trial of another cause; with which indeed Sir Douglas was also more or less connected: the said cause being the conduct of the Episcopalian clergyman on the estate of Glenrossie, who was actually endeavoring "most improperly," as the *Dowager* expressed it, to get a dis-burying-ground consecrated for burial in his own parish.

Now the small Episcopal Church and its interests had been confided by Sir Douglas to Savile Heaton, the tutor who had married Maggie, on that gentleman's own petition, and it was hardly possible to imagine greater complication than the state of matters induced by this arrangement. So, as the population was, there was a Free Kirk, a Scotch Established Church, and a somewhat decorated little temple of worship over which Mr. Savile Heaton presided: the Episcopalian Church, on which he spent the very slender funds he could command of his own; in which he preached rather elaborate sermons; and for which he trained a little band of singers, accompanied by a small organ.

The amount of fierce quarrelling and the differing Christians of these three churches; the frenzy of scorn; the sly biting; the consigning of each other's souls to eternal and unavoidable perdition; the losing sight of all the reality and purpose of prayer in the rabid disputes of how proper should be offered up, — was a spectacle for men and angels!

Maggie held with her husband; though she yawned all through the sermon, and frequently came to afternoon church in a state of drowsy tipsiness.

Her father, the old miller, went to the Free Kirk, her mother to the Established, "as a decent body ought;" and the

agreed in little except in being generally "fou" on a Sunday evening.

Lady Clochnaben was Presbyterian; and so was Miss Alice Ross: and both these ladies belonged also to that wide-spread and influential sect, the Pharisees. They were continually thanking God that they were better than their neighbours; and lost in contemplation of the moles in their brother's eye.

On the morning that Alice had chosen to ride over to the grim grey house on the misty hills, Lady Clochnaben had received a letter from Lorimer, which extremely displeased her: a letter in answer to one of her own in which she expressed her intention to give her "most determined opposition" to schemes of the sort set on foot in the neighbouring parish by Mr. Heaton, and requested Lorimer to remonstrate with Sir Douglas Ross respecting the conduct of that gentleman. She called her son's attention to a report of proceedings elsewhere, respecting the consecration of a cemetery, sending it thickly interspersed at its impressive passages with dashes from her firm hand in rigorous lines of ink. Such sentences as the following met with her especial approval:—

"This was a Presbyterian country, where the consecration of burying grounds was not only considered a thing of no use, but was condemned as superstitious and allied to Popery: consecration of the sold portions of the cemetery was an insult to the proprietors of the ground. Churchyards and churches, and many other places were consecrated many hundred years ago; but the Reformation swept these consecrations away, the will of the nation reduced them to nonentities. To consecrate would be to give the Episcopalians a right to the service of burial. Why should such favour be shown to Episcopalians? Presbyterians who had acquired rights of burial in the same ground might justly feel themselves aggrieved: and others might feel only merriment and surprise that such a ceremony had been indulged in at all: it was good for nothing: the cemetery was neither the better nor the worse for it, though it might indeed lead to a feeling against the cemetery in the minds of Presbyterians, who would not use it as they might otherwise have done."

Could Lady Clochnaben have seen the gloomy and contemptuous smile with which Lorimer read the last sentence, descriptive of the repugnance a right-minded Presbyterian would feel at the notion of being buried in ground defiled by consecration,

she would have been still more provoked at his answer, which abruptly said:—

"With reference to your expectation that I should write to Douglas to interfere with Mr. Heaton about the burying-ground, I wonder you do not see that I can do no such thing; nor, if I did, could my meddling be of any possible use. As to my own feelings on the subject, if people like to be buried like dogs, let them be so buried; but I cannot see why a piece of ground which is of neither use nor value to the present community, should remain useless, merely because people were formerly so buried in it. The consecration will not, I presume, affect the poor dust lying there, though by the report you send me it might discourage future corpses of the Presbyterian persuasion."

"This comes of residing abroad, you see, Alice," said the Dowager, as she gave a vicious tightening to the folds of the letter, and then tapped it with her bony forefinger. "Lorimer is grown into a Latitudinarian, and, for aught I know, into something worse. But I'm just resolved to fight out this matter, and I'll do it. The very idea of the Torrieburn folk makes me sick; and if you can't crush a man one way, you can another—that's my dictum."

Whether—like the wrathful king, who rashly said of Thomas à Beckett that he wondered he had no subject who would rid him of that priest—and so procured his murder,—the angry Dowager expressed before any very unscrupulous party her opinion that the place would be well rid of Mr. Heaton, cannot be clearly known; but his position, never a very comfortable one, was made more and more intolerable by a series of small and great annoyances, the last of which was attended with some danger, not only to him, but to Gertrude Ross.

An anxious consultation had been held as to the terms on which Mrs. Kenneth Ross of Torrieburn, now Mrs. Heaton, should stand with the young Lady Ross. Alice had resolutely stood out, even in her loneliest days, against communication with her. "She was not recognised by her mother," was her sole observation when pressed on the subject.

But Gertrude leaned to peace, and to that quiet dealing with unfortunate events in families, so seldom adopted—though, if the dignity of reserve towards the world, on which such apparent indulgence is founded, were more common, scandals would be kept private which the world only mocks at, and the persons affected by

them would be the happier. It was decided that Lady Ross should pay her visit to Torrieburn.

To "cut" the widow of Sir Douglas's brother, the wife of the clergyman who had brought Kenneth up, would have been a very harsh and difficult step to take. Intimacy was not desirable, was not probable; but countenance and acknowledgment towards one so nearly connected with Sir Douglas, seemed almost imperative.

To Torrieburn Gertrude drove with her husband, and shuddered over the account he gave, at the fatal bridge over the Falls, of the death of his brother. Her mind still full of the tragic tale, and of the description of Maggie herself in her youthful beauty, Gertrude entered the drawing-room, and was received by the occupant.

Mr. Heaton was a shy, earnest-looking man, who spoke very little, and kept glancing at his wife as if all the years that had passed had failed to quiet his expectations of her doing or saying something that would shock others.

Maggie herself was grown inordinately fat and coarse, though still handsome. She was dressed in the most *outré* style of the fashion, according to the peculiar faith in milliners which makes English, Scotch, and Irish women believe that they ought to put on, at their own firesides, toilettes which the French never wear at all, or only wear when dressed for visiting or driving in the Bois de Boulogne.

Maggie was a hundred times "finer" than the bride; and with her finery she had adopted a sort of affectedly jolly, defiant manner, by which she intended to show that she neither desired to be patronized, nor would submit to be "looked down upon."

All she did and said jarred with the feelings of compassion and interest with which Gertrude's mind had been filled.

As to Maggie, she saw Gertrude with bitter prejudice. Kenneth, her wild, insolent, vain Kenneth, had not observed the silence practised by Lorimer Boyd towards his dowager mother. He had told his less awful parent that he was in love, and was beloved again; and Maggie, remembering all his letters, took the view consequent upon them, namely, that she saw before her the jilting coquette who had "thrown over" the young lover, to become possessed of Glenrosie Castle, and make a more wealthy marriage.

The visit was awkward and embarrassed, in spite of gentle efforts at cordiality on the

part of the bride, all unconscious as she was of what was passing in Maggie's mind.

At length she said to the latter that she would like to clamber up the Falls and look down on the view; and "Mrs. R. Heaton," she called herself, prepared to accompany her. When they had nearly reached the head of the Falls, and while the thick screen of mountain ash and birch still hid the house they had left from view, a loud report startled them; and, looking through the trees, they saw smoke issuing from one of the windows.

Descending rapidly, they retraced their steps towards the dwelling they had so lately left, and found Sir Douglas and Mrs. Heaton standing in front of the house, angrily commenting on some disaster that had just taken place.

On examination it was found that the iron bush of a cart-wheel, tightly plugged up at both ends with wood, in one of which a hole had been drilled, through which it had been filled with gunpowder, with a fuse inserted, so as to form a grenade, had been placed under the window of the drawing-room where they had been talking, and fired.

The bush had burst into splinters, spreading in all directions, passing through the window and ceiling, and lodging in the floor of the room above. Glass was shattered; furniture broken; the smell of gunpowder still floated on the air. Maggie did not scream; she stood panting and staring for a few seconds, and then with excessive fierceness she exclaimed, "I'd be glad the necks were ground in our mill!"

After which speech she flung herself to the arms of her husband, and there continued sobbing wildly till she saw, or imagined she saw, a retreating form of a man among the bushes, when she suddenly ceased weeping, and sprang forward with an activity very surprising in so cumbersome a figure.

No one was discoverable, however, as she came slowly back again.

Her husband spoke kindly to her, and bade her take farewell of Sir Douglas and Gertrude, which she did somewhat sulkily; Sir Douglas reiterating to Mr. Heaton assurances of assistance and goodwill.

Gertrude was very silent during the drive home. She had been frightened and bewildered; and much that she found at Glenrosie was so disappointing. Maggie so coarse and strange; Alice so ungovernable and alien; she scarcely knew why the squabbles about religious forms, which

been discussed before her, so hideous and yet so trifling! She sighed, and turned to Sir Douglas, who had also been silently ruminating. She took his true frank hand, and he bent and kissed her as she sat silently there by his side.

Much was disappointing; but what could quench the joy of that love? Much was disappointing; but Sir Douglas, her own Douglas, was perfect; and she was his for ever!

CHAPTER XXI.

MAMMA'S LETTER.

PARADISE had a cloud over it after this. Gertrude could not comprehend bitterness; she had never felt it. Holy thoughts, with her, were peaceful thoughts. She talked a great deal with Mr. Heaton over his troubles and anxieties, and produced a corresponding degree of displeasure in rigid Lady Clochnaben, and watchful Alice Ross. Her principles were very lax in their opinion. She had even been guilty one Sabbath evening of singing. Sir Douglas had caught cold out fishing; his eyes were inflamed; he could not read or occupy himself in any way, and his wife opened her well-worn music-book, and sat down to amuse him with her little store of melodies, in the most natural way in the world. Lady Clochnaben was spending a couple of days at Glenrossie. She stared at the bride; and, clutching the two arms of the high-backed chair in which she was seated, so as to give herself a stiffer and more authoritative pose, she said sternly, "Lady Ross, you're surely forgetting what day it is!"

Gertrude looked wonderingly round.

"Gertie only remembers that it is the day after I have taken cold," laughed Sir Douglas.

"You should not encourage such doings at Glenrossie," said the Dowager severely; "there never was mirth or singing since I can remember the place, on such an improper day as the Lord's-day."

"I really do not understand," said Gertrude.

"Don't you know, Gertie, that we Caledonians are so strict in our observance of the Sabbath, that singing and such like diversions are forbidden? There is a sad story extant, of a lady who lost her pet dog for ever, because, when it strayed, the gentleman friend she was walking with was afraid to whistle for it, on account of the day being Sunday."

"The Lord forgive us, is *that* the way you mean to instruct your wife!" exclaimed the fearless Dowager, setting her spectacles at Sir Douglas. Alice said nothing. She looked up with a plaintive, pitiful glance, at her half-brother, shook her head slightly, as much as to say, "this will never do!" and then, slowly rising, with a volume of explanations of the prophecies of Ezekiel in her hand, she crept away from the profanity, and went to bed.

Gertrude rather pined for her mother in this alienated state of things; she had been used to love and petting from that tender though weak-minded companion. But the youthful-elderly was making a happy little "season" in London. She was in no hurry to leave the metropolis; to forsake the circle of recovered friends, and discourage their invitations by burying herself in the Highlands.

"I will come to you, my darling," she wrote, "but not just yet. I would like to come in the autumn, when you have a nice shooting party, and then see your hills and heather braes. I have such a pretty little house in Park Street! such a sunny drawing-room, and a little boudoir (you know how I love a boudoir), with a Louis Quatorze looking-glass, and a quantity of lovely little odds and ends. I was lucky to get it! It was advertised as a 'bachelor' house, and now they say it belonged to a 'bachelor of the other sex;' but that makes no difference. I mean it does not signify to me who lived here before me, of course. And indeed the proof that it doesn't signify at all, is, that all my friends call, and call, till you'd think they would never have done calling! And I am constantly asked out to dinner, when they want a lady in a hurry and some one has failed, and in the same way I am asked to accompany young married friends to the opera. I assure you I have spent a very pleasant time, and am quite pleased to see how little forgotten I am; for I certainly thought people rather cold about your wedding; but then we had only just arrived, and I had not gone the round with my cards, you know."

"There has been a magnificent *fête* at Devonshire House, and the Duke came up to me directly, and said how rejoiced he was to see me, and that he did not think I had altered the least in the last fifteen years. And he asked after you, too — at least, he asked after my 'children;' and when I told him I had lost my poor boy, and that my other child was a daughter who was grown up and married, he seemed quite surprised; and only that he was obliged,

at the moment, to go and be civil to somebody else, I meant to have seized the opportunity of begging him to remember you when you came to town; but you can call there with me, and that will do as well, — I mean as well as my speaking about you.

"And now, dear, I will conclude, and promise faithfully to come to you later in the year. You know it is said to be as well, after marriage, to leave the young couple awhile to themselves. Excuse my *little joke*; for, of course, you are not a 'young' couple: I mean Sir Douglas is not young, though you are, and *that* made the joke; but it need not vex you, for he is a great deal handsomer than any young man I see going about, and I always thought him handsomer even than his saucy nephew, of whom I hope you have good news, and that he will keep out of the way.

"Your ever affectionate Mother,

"CHARLOTTE SKIFTON.

"P. S. — My dearest Gertie, I re-open my letter, because I really cannot let it go without telling you such a piece of good news! I have just got my card for one of the Royal balls!

"I went, you know, to the Drawing-room, the very first thing I did, after all the fuss of your marriage, &c. was over; but the Court being new, and all that, I really did not feel sanguine about being remembered: and I can't tell you how pleased I was when I opened the big envelope just now, and out came the Lord Chamberlain's card! I went to the Drawing-room in very dark garter blue, with my few diamonds very prettily arranged: and I did think of wearing pink for this occasion, but perhaps it would be thought too *young*, you know; people are not good-natured: so I shall go in pale silver-grey and pearls, or in mauve; I understand mauve is Her Majesty's favourite colour; but perhaps for that very reason she may be wearing it herself; and that would incline me to the grey, especially as I have not been to a Court ball since your poor father died; and I have always thought a widow should wear very quiet colours, at all events for a good while after her mourning is over.

"I suppose you will attend the very first Drawing-room next season? Sir Douglas must wish that: and you will have plenty of time to think about it beforehand. I advise you to employ Madame Albertine Chiffonne, she is just come to set up in London; and is quite the rage among the fine ladies, and very busy. But she has promised, however overwhelmed with or-

ders she may be, that she will give me the preference first, and was uncommonly civil.

"I have Isidor as coiffeur; I think he has more taste than Cavalier. He amused me very much with stories of how busy he was at the Coronation some years ago. He said he dressed a hundred and fifty-four heads between the evening and the next morning. A good many had their heads dressed over night, and slept or sat up in arm-chairs or leaning back on the sofas; and a good many met at each other's houses, — to save time; and make sure of Isidor, — and then sat in a long row, while he and his assistants brushed, and oiled, and plaited, and twisted, and twirled, till he said he had scarcely any sensation left in his fingers and thumb. And the old Marchioness of Timberly was so afraid he would be tired, and not finish her head off properly (being one of the last) that she kept offering him claret every two minutes, saying, 'Take another glass, Mr. Isidor, I think your hand drops.' 'Certainly,' he said, 'if I had swallowed the wine that old lady offered me, I should no longer have distinguished where the heads were that I was to dress.'

"And what do you think, Gertie, of the speech of that handsome eccentric Mr. Cregan, whom Lorimer Boyd used to admire so — when I told *her* the story? She said, 'More fools they! I rolled my hair in a smooth twist, and walked across the Park to Westminster in the cool early morning with my brother; for I considered it a day on which of all days in the year I was least likely to be looked at, and most likely to endure great fatigue. I knew the streets would be crowded, the carriages dead-locked from their numbers; and the only thing I wished I had taken overnight was my breakfast; for it was impossible to get the servants to attend to anything on that eventful morning.'

"So like Mrs. Cregan, wasn't it? take things in that cool sort of way. I dare just as cool about the Royal balls.

"Well, I ain't like her, Gertie, and I declare my hand quite shakes while I write you about it, only I thought you would be glad to know Her Most Gracious Majesty had not forgotten me, but had sent me a card.

"This P. S. has grown quite to the length of another letter, but you can't wonder at that, because of what I had to say.

"Your affectionate Mum,

"C. S."

"Here is a visitor you will be glad to see," said Sir Douglas cheerily, open-

ing the door just as Gertrude had got to the end of the little fine *pattes de mouche* of her mother's writing. "Here is Lorimer, on a two months' leave, come to look after Clochnaben! You must persuade him to give us a week of his time. You are lady of the Castle now, you know."

Gertrude rose, and fixed her glad soft eyes on Lorimer's countenance; not without a certain degree of nervous trepidation; remembering all that had occurred, and the confidence she had placed in him, when Kenneth's reckless love-making and yet more reckless threats, made her fear she scarcely knew what, for Sir Douglas.

Lorimer also seemed a little nervous; though his manner was generally impassive. His hand was icy cold as he took hers, and

his eyes were averted. He gave a short stifled sigh, and stood for a moment in one of the oriel windows.

"It is a long time since I was here," he said.

The sadness with which he spoke was so obvious, that Gertrude longed to ask him if aught had occurred to fret him: but there are men whose reserve you dare not break through, however real your sympathy may be with their supposed sorrow. Lorimer was one of these men.

Gertrude felt embarrassed: and, to help her embarrassment, she held out her mother's letter.

"I have just heard from mamma," she said; "you can read her news if you like."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WORLD AS IT IS.

A SMILE, half amused, half contemptuous, stole over Lorimer's gloomy face as he silently laid the letter down.

"It is very pleasant to know mamma is so well satisfied, is it not?" said Gertrude. "When first we came to England she thought people were not quite kind: that old friends had half forgotten her. I am so glad she is happy, and that all invite and welcome her."

"And I also am glad she is happy; though for the life of me I never can understand these artificial joys and sorrows. I wonder if you, Gertrude, will ever gradually become so enamoured of adventitious distinction as to feel flurried at getting an opera-box, or a big Chamberlain's card?"

"I should like to be noticed by all friends, and by my sovereign."

"That might not follow. These things are done by lists in the Chamberlain's office; often very carelessly and capriciously done; *always* with a great amount of favouritism; not the least in the way your poor mother supposes: and, when all is done, you are one, of a crowd of ten or twelve hundred persons, the majority of whom perhaps never get a glimpse of their sovereign."

"But I believe," said Gertrude eagerly, "that mamma was a very great beauty, and very much noticed at Court formerly; and her return to these scenes would not be unobserved. And then to come back to England, and all things English, after such long wandering absence — such sorrowful absence — that in itself must be happiness. Ah! how my father yearned to be well enough to return!" and she paused and sighed.

"Well," said Lorimer, "you, Gertrude, who are so fond of Italy and far-off lands, and have been away till you are half a foreigner, might be amazed and interested by hearing how little of 'England and all things English,' there is, at all events, in this Court to which Lady Charlotte returns."

"The English Court?"

"The English Court. What should you say if I told you that our royal family are in fact Italians and Germans, the German element predominating? The house of Brunswick springs from Albert Azo, Marquis of Tuscany, a prince of Lombardy, who is said to have lived to the ripe age of a hundred and one. He married, in 1040, Cunigunde, heiress of the first Welfs or

Guelphs, Earls of Altorff, in Swabia. Their son, Guelph IV. of Esté, obtained the Duchy of Bavaria from Henry IV. and is the acknowledged head of the Guelph family. And then you get down a long line of foreign princes; past Henry Guelph, who lost Bavaria; past Guelph VI. and his romantic dealings with Conrad III.; past Henry Otho, the friend of Richard Cœur de Lion; past Ernest the Pious of Zell (one of that group of princes of the Empire who were first called Protestants); past the fiery old soldier, Prince Christian — who, losing an arm in battle, when marching to relieve Bergen-op-Zoom, always afterwards wore a silver one; past all sorts of confused links and intermarriages, till George Lewis married Sophia Dorothy of Zell, and was the first prince of the race that wore the British crown, — and spoke in broken English to his British subjects."

"I suppose I ought to know it all; but I never thought of it till you told me."

"No. And, if we were to stand on our nationalities as a merit, and on the antiquity of families — not royal, but at all events titled — perhaps some of the lower order of Scotch and Irish, and the humblest of English families, might make their boast of a more direct descent than what are called the aristocracy of our land. The latter are fond of boasting that they 'came over with the Conqueror,' —

"From Norroway, from Norroway, from Norroway o'er the faem,"

as the old ballad puts it. Ah! what folly it all seems, sometimes, when one sits and thinks it over, this adoration of pomps and splendours; and how the quaint old text preached by the priest Sanders, in Wat Tyler's time, comes to mind: —

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

"But would you put aside all distinctions if you had your way? I think you would find that impossible."

"No, I would not put them aside if it were possible. God made gradation: it is no invention of man's. He made strength and weakness of body, clearness or dullness of intellect, capacity and incapacity of all sorts; as He made men and angels. I object only to the inordinate value set on accidental distinctions: distinctions inherited or acquired in some way totally independent of any merit in the possessor: perhaps possessed by persons of singular demerit. I hold the

sort of blind adulation offered to mere rank, wealth, and what is called 'position,' to be as much an intoxication of the understanding as the state of a man who rises tipsy from table. 'Drunken, but not with wine'—according to the Scriptural phrase. Drunken at the careless feast of life, and incapable of seeing things in their true light or relative proportion. In Spain and in Austria I think it is rank and high descent that people are drunk about, and in England I am not sure but it is wealth."

"Ah! yes; because wealth commands so many other things."

"Yes. Apparent splendour and good living—even if he does not share them—if he has no chance of sharing them—fill an Englishman's heart or brain with respect for the owner of these advantages."

"Not only Englishmen," said Gertrude smiling.

"No; it is in weak human nature: riches dazzle like light. There is a very ingenious and humorous story in a very old collection of Italian tales by one Sercambi, which represents the poet Dante as being invited by some king to dinner. He comes, dressed very shabbily; sits below the salt; and is overlooked and forgotten till after the feast; when the king says, 'By the by, what is become of that poet I intended to talk to?' Dante, who has meanwhile departed a good deal offended, is immediately followed and invited anew. He comes to supper, superbly dressed in crimson and gold, and is served with extreme attention; but the courtiers observe with amazement that he pours the soup down his sleeves, tucks cutlets into his bosom, and smears his velvet jerkin with rich sauces. 'Good gracious, your majesty!' says the boldest of these supping nobles; 'why has this poet such *bruttezza* in his manners?' The question is passed on by the king to Dante, who gravely replies: 'When I came here dressed shabbily, and sat quietly in my corner, I was forgotten and overlooked. I now come in very fine clothes, and am very much attended to; I therefore concluded it was rather my clothes than myself that you admired and invited, and I was willing to bestow on them a share of your hospitality.'"

Gertrude laughed. "Well, you confess it is a very old story, and one applicable to many countries and many phases of society; and it is inherent in human nature to be dazzled by splendour. The savage whose tawny neck is hung with beads, and whose hair is spiked with parrots' tails, is an object of the greatest admiration and envy, rely upon it, to his less festooned comrades."

"Of course he is: leave it therefore to savages, and not to tutored minds, to adore tinsel."

"But it is not the tinsel they adore; it is the symbol of a condition beyond and above their own."

"We shall argue in a circle, since I come back to the denial of such appearances being just evidence of a condition above and beyond their own. Oh, Gertrude, one of your greatest charms is the utter unworldliness, the true perception, the natural independence of your mind, and I should grieve with a grief of which you can know nothing if contact with the world altered you. You have seen nothing of life yet but its real joys and real sorrows."

"Do you think," said she gently, "that such a preparation will make me more likely to set false value on those which you term 'artificial' joys and sorrows?"

"I scarcely know what I expect," said Lorimer gloomily. "We are told we cannot touch pitch without being defiled; and why should I hope that you will live in the world your mother is so desirous to see you enter, without gradually adopting some of the views held there?—false, narrow, absurd views."

"You have lived in that world yourself, and you see how opposite is the result."

"Among them, but not of them, like Lord Byron's 'Aurora Raby,' so innocent and unspoilable is my nature," said Lorimer.

"There! you said that with one of your own grim old smiles. You look at last more like yourself!" said Gertrude, smiling also.

"Have I not been looking like myself? I think that must be a change for the better."

"No, you have been looking much more gloomy than I ever saw you. You must have grown gloomier because I went away from Naples and left you."

She spoke the sentence playfully. For a moment Lorimer Boyd turned to her with an expression she had never seen in his face: a sort of fierce wistfulness. Then he again averted his eyes, and said after a brief pause—

"Yes; I missed you. You see it does not do to leave a sullen man too much alone. Now take me out, and let me walk with you on the terrace, and see the improvements Douglas has made before and since he came to have your help. The poets assure us that all things smile in the sunshine: perhaps I shall smile also, and grow quite genial and jolly."

And Gertrude laughed a merry laugh as she led the way out, for the epithets

"genial" and "jolly" were certainly anything but applicable to her friend Lorimer Boyd.

Sir Douglas met them as they advanced.

"Twice have I passed under those windows, and called to you," he said; "and you two were in such absorbed discourse you did not notice me."

"Yes. Mr Boyd has been talking in a most republican and American manner. I do not know what Lady Clochnabhen would say if she could have heard him. I believe he would be disowned, thrown off, and left entirely dependent on our indulgent willingness to shelter him while in Scotland."

"I have been merely generalizing, to prevent too entire a dependence on the flatteries of kings, courts, and grandees, now that Gertrude is to live among English fine ladies," said Lorimer. "I do not wish her soul's wings to be caught in the cobwebs."

The eager hand of Sir Douglas caught Gertrude's with a sudden clasp, and held it.

"My wife," said he, with a proud, confident smile, "will never have to depend on the frowns or smiles of kings, courts, or fine ladies. We will make a world of our own, and she shall be queen of it. I do not think she will give me much trouble by her desire to overstep those boundaries; and as to you, my dear Lorimer, you will preach in vain to get the cobwebs that catch meaner hearts swept away. When Cinderella drove out in an enchanted pumpkin, she was saluted and cheered; but when she ran barefoot home, she was very naturally taken for a beggar. Gertrude shall keep a cheerful medium between these two states."

He kissed his wife's hand gaily, and gently released it, and she smiled shyly in his face. Lorimer shrank alike from the smile and the light caress. That happy security of wedded love smote him like a blow.

And in the midst of all his new-found happiness Sir Douglas felt instinctively that there was, in his old friend, some inexplicable change, some cloud of mingled grief, discontent, and bitterness, that pained and puzzled him. He loved Lorimer Boyd very dearly, very heartily; he had no *half-love* to give any one: he longed to say to him, as when they were young lads at Eton, "What ails you, Lorimer?"

But, intimate as they were, that passionate brave man dared not ask his reserved and gloomy friend what ailed him.

"Not ev'n the nearest heart, and next our own, Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh" —

and he was fain to remain ignorant of the reasons for smiling or sighing of his former chum and schoolfellow. Only now and then, as he thought it over, he wished Lorimer might find "a helpmeet for him," and so learn to see life in its most cheerful aspect.

And meanwhile it is not to be supposed that Lorimer sulked and sighed all day long. On the contrary, his visit was replete with pleasure and interest to those who welcomed him; and, after the first few strange hours, that curiously rapid familiarity with new objects and conditions of things, which those who have travelled much or had great experience of life must have been conscious of in their own minds, — that acceptance of, and adaptation to, circumstances and scenes which, from being vivid and startling, soon compose themselves into the every-day colouring of existence, — came to him also, with a certain sense of relief and calm. And it seemed to him that for years Gertrude had been doing the honours of Glenrosie Castle to him, choosing for him a room with a pleasant aspect, bending her graceful head over the well-furnished writing-table, to see that all was there that his busy hand could want, and cheerily notifying to him the breakfast, dinner, and post hours in the house of his friend. Almost he smiled "one of his old grim smiles," as she called them, when, left alone in his bachelor apartment, and, leaning back in the easy-chair with folded arms, and eyes musingly fixed on the old-fashioned cornices, he compared the *stunned* sensation which he had experienced during the first hour of his arrival with the settled freedom of thought and quiet conviction that there he was, after years of acquaintance with Gertrude Skifton, and much communion with her in afflicting as well as trivial scenes, at length a visitor in her home as a married woman, the wife of his old friend Douglas, who had drawn that excellent prize in life's uncertain lottery.

And Gertrude, passing back from her hospitable little cares to her husband's dressing-room, pressed a thankful kiss on his forehead as she said, "I am so glad he is come: I hope he will enjoy his visit here. Only think of that good, faithful, pleasant friend being son to that dreadful old Lady Clochnabhen, and brother to that sick slug, who thinks of nothing but himself from morning to night! I am so glad he is come."

And then she sat down on a low *prie-dieu*, and half read her book, half watched, with eyes of exceeding love and admiration, Old Sir Douglas, though sooth to say he was doing nothing more admirable than perusing with very slender interest the *Edinburgh*

Courant and other daily papers. And, as she watched him with enamoured eyes, she thought surely no one ever yet so exactly answered the description given in some fragmentary lines of Leigh Hunt's:—

"No courtier's face, although the smile was ready;
Nor scholar's, though the look was deep and steady;
Nor soldier's, for the power was more of mind.
Too true for violence and too refined:
And whereso'er his fine frank eyes were thrown,
He drew the hearts he wished for to his own."

And, so musing, Gertrude decided within herself that she certainly was one of the most blessed and fortunate of married women.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WISER THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

WHEN feline Alice found another subject for her watchful powers had become an inmate at Glenrossie, she purred more softly, and moved more circuitously, and sat more quietly in window-nooks, than ever. She also made more visits than ever to Clochnabhen; and, indeed, in nothing did she more resemble the analogous cat, than in her swift and sudden disappearances and apparitions—that mixture of slowness and swiftness peculiar to Grimalkin. You saw her stealing along in the sunshine by the broad yew hedge, and thought her still in the garden; when lo! she eluded your eye, and was off in a noiseless scamper round the wall, and through the gate, and over the hill. If you met her face to face (which was the rarest of accidents), your presence seemed to give the same signal for flight that it always does to the cat. She might be doing no harm whatever; she never *was* doing any visible harm; only prowling along, with a book, or a few flowers, or a half-eaten peach; but instantly, with a sort of whisk like pussy's flexile tale, the light shawl was thrown together, the book seemed to close of itself, and that, or the half-eaten peach, or the gathered flowers, half vanished under its fringe, grasped by a little pale-fingered hand. If her greeting was not an absolute "mew," it was seldom a more articulate sound; and then she passed you. She never turned to walk with you: not once, on those few occasions that Gertrude had thus encountered her, had such an at-

tempt at companionship taken place. She passed slowly, and disappeared swiftly. You could not say she ran away, but, somehow, she was gone. As to the frank, audible "Good-morning," or, "What a sweet evening!" or any allusion to rain, frost, sunshine, shade, blossom, or fruit, such as generally marks this sort of meetings in familiar haunts, between inmates of the same dwelling,—her little colourless mouth had never shaped such syllables to any one. Gertrude had wasted much gentle pity at first upon her. She set all down to the habitual loneliness of her life. The pity of affectionate natures is often wasted thus. The impulsive cannot comprehend the impassive. Warm words and tender approaches are expected to subvert a condition of things as changeless as if the flint stones of the bare sea-beach were watered to produce a crop of primroses.

At first, Alice made a visible (though very cautious) attempt to please Lorimer Boyd. It was her habit. No one could tell how the conversation fell on topics familiar to him. No one could say how this grave, slow-speaking Miss Ross had learned so much of international law; or where she picked up her odd particulars of diplomatic tradition—from embassies to Attila down to the receptions of Queen Elizabeth; from the gossiping inventions of ancient Lord Malmesbury to the *menù* of the festival dinners given by Lord Castlemaine in the last embassy sent by England to the Pope; all which topics she handled without much sequence or order, but in a natural innocent way, as if Lorimer's presence had merely reminded her—roused in her, as it were, one of her habitual and favourite trains of thought.

But Lorimer Boyd was not a man easily flattered or easily taken in. In his own way, he was as much a watcher of those he associated with as Alice herself. It was watch for watch. She was Douglas's half-sister, and he was rather curious to decide what sort of woman the daughter of that icy Lady Ross had turned out; he vaguely remembered thinking her a most repellant little specimen of girlhood, when he and Douglas were boys; but his judgment of her now was more favourable. When first Gertrude asked him in one of their walks, "What do you think of Alice?" he answered readily enough: "Well, she seems a harmless little 'crittur,' with a good deal of shrewdness and intelligence."

But, towards the close of the second week of his visit, it happened that Sir Douglas and Alice set off for a ride together, and

Lorimer Boyd, after assisting to adjust the habit of the lady, and handing her a little whip as slender and flexible as herself, looked after her in a musing manner for a minute or two; then turning to Gertrude, he said, "That is a very nice pony of your sister-in-law's, and would take a long day easily. I should not be surprised if she rode a broom-stick at night."

"Ah!" laughed Gertrude, "and a little while ago you said she was a 'harmless creature.'"

"Yes. I thought so then. I do not think so now. I think she is a creature full of harm. But Douglas does not."

"No. Douglas is fond of her, and she is getting less afraid of him."

"Afraid of Douglas! Miss Ross afraid! Rely upon it, Gertrude, she fears nothing in this world. And I much doubt if she fears anything in the next."

"She would be much surprised if she heard your last remark: for she is stricter than strict as to her religious theories."

"Theories?—yes. Our religious theories are for our neighbours; the *practice* is for ourselves."

"Well! we will talk of something pleasanter. You can't think how painful it was to me to find I could not like Douglas's sister. He has so few relations, and this the only near one. I wish you were his brother; though, I believe, even then he could not love you better than he does."

That very evening did Sir Douglas confide to his wife (making poor Gertrude feel quite guilty in consequence of the memory of the morning's conversation) that he thought it would be a remarkably happy chance if Lorimer were to fall in love with Alice; that it would be a most suitable choice, Alice being extremely sensible and fond of grave employments, and no longer a mere girl—which would not suit Lorimer. He even attempted, in his own unsophisticated way, to further this chance, and open the eyes of Boyd to her merits, by saying one day, "Don't you think there is something very remarkable in Alice, in spite of her quiet ways?" And Lorimer's answer was, "Yes, indeed I do." But, whether grim smile, or grim tone, destroyed the value of the verbal acquiescence, it is certain that Sir Douglas felt so much irritation at the reply that he rejoined rather testily, "You have lived so much abroad, Lorimer, that I don't think a quiet Scotch or English woman has any chance of pleasing you."

Lorimer did not speak. He was looking at Gertrude, whose cheek had flushed sud-

denly during the brief colloquy. He thought of days at Naples, when angry insolent Kenneth had spoken of *her* as "one of your quiet girls," from whom much evidence of preference could not be expected. Ah! how unlike the quiet of Douglas's half-sister was the nature of his wife, and how strange that the man who so truly loved the one could be taken in by the other!

Strange as it might be, however, in Mr. Boyd's opinion, Sir Douglas leaned greatly to his half-sister. And the inexplicable result of all was, that when Alice—aware instinctively that, instead of pleasing, she displeased,—withdrew as cautiously as she had advanced, she adopted a certain manner of being timid and rather ill-used:—ill-used in not being more liked, and more petted; but wistful and sorrowful, because of course it was her own fault: it could only be her own fault that she did not please more! She would engage as formerly in the conversation, and then suddenly withdraw from it; give out little final meagre sentences, and cease; as knowing that her talk was not wanted, was not welcome. She would answer Gertrude's call of "Are you coming too, Ailie?" by a doubtful dropping of her work or book, and a sort of appeal to Sir Douglas, if he happened to be present, "Oh! I don't know; do you think they really want me, or that Lady Ross says it out of kindness? I feel so *de trop*—they know each other so well, and I don't know Mr. Boyd at all;—oh! no—let me go with you. I will wait till you go—please let me!" Once, indeed, she even ventured to say, after long silence and leaning of her head on her hand, with a sort of wondering sigh, "Can I have offended Mr. Boyd in any way, or is it only that I bore him?"

Which speech so touched honest Sir Douglas that he suddenly stooped and kissed her on the forehead, saying at the same time, "My dear Ailie, how can you be so foolish? How could you bore any one? I'm sure you are better informed than most women. But Lorimer was always rather an odd fellow."

And "Ailie" was quite satisfied with the result of her dejected remark, but she only replied humbly, "Do you think so? But you are so good, Douglas; so very good; so good to *every one*!"

So good to every one, that even to her (poor wif and stray as she must consider herself), even to *her*, some little share of manna must fall and be gathered. That was the tone taken by Ailie, in pursuance of the tactics of Ailie. Oh! if gallant and

frank Sir Douglas could but have seen her in her turret chamber, an hour or so afterwards, how extremely startled and puzzled would that excellent soldier have been!

Standing on tiptoe; watching; leaning up against the shutter of her high window; twisting and untwisting, with slow though restless fingers, the long boa of light-coloured fur which was coiled round her neck, to protect her throat from the evening air; her eyes half-closed, as short-sighted persons habitually close them to assist their vision — giving out a sort of trembling glitters: her brows set in a hard frown, and her lips in a compressed smile, the union of which contradictory expressions make up the "demoniac" pattern, followed in Mephistopheles, and such like representations. If he could have seen her! And all because Clochnaben's brother would not like her, and she knew, from old Lady Clochnaben, that he had liked her sister-in-law; and she wondered, as unconscious Gertrude advanced with her companion up the steep terraces to the oaken doors, how all would turn out, and whether they were talking of her, or of old times, or what.

As she watched, they stopped; a short distance from the entrance. Gertrude had been smiling; now she looked suddenly grave; more than grave — her face wore a look of painful pity; Lorimer was telling her something that moved her greatly. What could it be? Presently he struck with his cane at the lower branch of one of two stunted old fir trees, whose picturesque appearance saved them from being uprooted and carted away for firewood.

Then, all of a sudden, it flashed upon Alice Ross what Lorimer was narrating! He was telling the memorable story of the hanging of the two dogs, which preceded the sending of Douglas to Eton, where he and Douglas first became friends. No doubt abusing her mother, and making out a fine story of ill-usage and cruelty to the boys long ago. And, though Alice had not loved her mother (being indeed herself too much of that mother's nature), she resented the supposed abuse. She would have liked to have thrown a sharp stone at the speaker: to have shot a poisoned arrow at him: but he and Gertrude passed on, under the archway; and the fierce illumination of Alice's cat-like eyes subsided as she turned away from the window, and prepared to smooth her hair and dress in soft white muslin, and go in to dinner with a noiseless velvety step, leaning humbly on her brother's arm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GODLY FOLK, AND RELIGIOUS FOLK.

"Is it not most unnatural that you should prefer staying on, as you are doing, at Glenrossie, instead of being, as you ought to be, at Clochnaben, Lorimer?"

"Well, no, mother; it may be wrong, but it is not unnatural."

"Don't smile at me in that way, sir; I hate it! You know we're all here in confusion and torment. That shameless sinner from Torrieburn, and her husband, and the drunken old miller her father, have all been up here, actually up at the castle, expecting to see my face, and storming loud enough to be heard round the hall, and up the turrets."

"And did you see them?"

"I? I see that low-bred sinner with two names? Lorimer, you disgust me."

"Really, mother, the inscription of Maggie Ross's sins on my memory!"

"Don't call her Maggie Ross, if you've any sense left of propriety!"

"Well, of Maggie Heaton's sins, — on my memory, is mossed over by Time, like an old tombstone."

"Then you read Scripture to little purpose, 'The worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched,' — that's Scripture dictum!"

"So is — 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool,' mother."

"Lorimer, you would try the patience of a saint."

"Saints never have any patience — not, at least, with their neighbours and fellow-creatures; only with their martyrdoms."

"Will you be serious? or will you tell me at once you don't choose to assist me when I send for you, and so take yourself off again to Glenrossie?"

"I will be serious, mother, quite serious; but we think so differently on these topics. Maggie Ross — or Maggie Heaton — was, I believe, a girl of sixteen when Kenneth Ross chose to tempt and ruin her. I consider her, therefore, more sinned against than sinning. She is now a woman of middle age, re-married, and to a clergyman!"

"Clergyman, indeed! the boy's tutor!"

"Re-married to a gentleman who was her boy's tutor. And, apparently, with no fault towards her present husband, except her vulgarity, which she cannot help, and which must have been just as evident (though her beauty may have excused it)

when he first took her to wife. They are your neighbours, and connexions of Douglas; and I should have thought that Christian charity" —

"Lorimer, don't exasperate me by talking of Christian charity! Leave Christian charity to the cooks that sell and give away the dripping that don't belong to them. Don't preach such abominable nonsense about charity to a woman who's as fat as a porpoise, and as bold as brass; with her hair all blowzy, and a tongue like the clack of a mill-wheel! Such a woman to dare to come here to Clochnaben! Here, — where her very existence was never acknowledged."

"Bless me! poor annulled and ignored, Maggie. But now, my dear mother, what has she been here about? and how has she at last compelled you, by some riot you have not explained to me, to give her a hearing, and, though late in life, at last to acknowledge her existence?"

"I gave her *no* hearing, I tell you; except that my ears were dinned and deafened by her brawling below. And I refused to see the miller, or her husband the tutor."

"Then you did a very uncourteous thing. What did they come here about?"

"They came here brawling and complaining, and saying they had made the discovery (discovery, forsooth!) that the plugged cart-wheel that was blown up under Heaton's ridiculous ornamented window was part of a cart left on my factor's ground, and that *he* must have had something to do with it; and that they insisted on seeing me, and having an inquiry into the whole matter."

"Well, that seems simple enough; and the agreeing to it ought to have satisfied them, and sent them away."

"Agreeing to it! I do think, of all the provoking sons that ever were born, you are the worst. Agreeing to it! I just sent the factor himself, honest man, to speak with them, and give them their answer."

"And he exculpated himself, of course, and denied it?"

"Exculpate! — exculpate to that brazen sinner! He told them to go about their business, and not come flying among respectable people. He called Maggie's father a drunken old carle, and Maggie herself some name or other — a forswearing jade, I think it was — and said something about her not being married, and the conduct of the people at the Mill —

"Oh, mother!"

"You may say 'Oh, mother!' but I'll tell you what it is, Lorimer: if you can't

take reasonable part with your own people, and choose to leave your mother's house to be invaded and insulted, I'm no mother of yours; and the sooner you get back to Italy, or elsewhere, the better I shall be pleased."

There was gloom and a sort of sorrowful contempt in Lorimer Boyd's eyes, as he raised them to his mother's face; who, tall and gaunt, had stood up in the angry excitement of the last sentence. "Mother," he said, "you desired me, just now, to be serious. Will you be serious, and tell me clearly what these people have done, and what you want *me* to do?"

"I want you to prevent my being subjected to such insolence."

"How can I prevent it? In my opinion, you should have received, at all events, Mr. Saville Heaton, courteously; assured him that the strictest inquiry should be made into the outrage he justly complains of, even though you felt convinced no one employed by you on this estate could have had art or part in such an atrocious act; and so dismissed him. I think it was an insult to send to him the very person of whom he came to complain."

"Then you think precisely the contrary of what I do. I sent the factor to deny it, and there's an end. I'm not going to interfere with any inquiry, or anything at all of the sort. They've made their beds, and now they may lie in them, — that's my dictum."

"What beds?"

"I'll you what, Lorimer: though Clochnaben's a poor creature and a sickly goose, he's a better son to me than you are, with all your brains and your book-writing. You know well enough what I mean. I mean that they've chosen — with their new-fangled notions of singing, and glass windows, and indecent consecration of bits of ground, where parishioners lay in their proper graves before ever Mr. Heaton was thought of — to set the whole neighborhood against them. The place is in a perfect uproar with his ways; and I'm sure I don't wonder at plugged cart-wheels, or anything else, with that Jezebel living at Torrieburn, and he preaching fancy sermons wide of the doctrine, and burying folks as if they were Roman papists."

"Do you seriously think that, because a man preaches as an Episcopalian, and endeavours to get a bit of unused burial-ground consecrated for the reception of the dead bodies whose occupying souls were, in their life, of his own persuasion, it is therefore fair, right, and not to be wondered at, that an attempt should be made to blow up

his house, injure his property, and, for aught the criminal could tell, destroy lives?"

"I desire you'll not call my factor a criminal."

"Then you think it *was* your factor! Mother, it is with grief and shame I leave you; and I shall go straight to Torrieburn, and talk this over with Saville Heaton."

"I don't believe it was my factor: but I don't choose you to take part with these people; and I hope the vengeance of heaven will fall down upon them for their conduct."

"Good God!"

"Ay, 'Good God!' and He wouldn't be good if there weren't punishment for the bad; that's my dictum."

Lorimer rose.

"Before I go," said he, with gloomy gravity, "I will once more put the question I ought simply to have asked at once, instead of jesting on these subjects—What do you want done; and why did you send for me?"

"I want to—to sweep these people away," answered Lady Clochnaben, fiercely. "I want you to desire your friend Sir Douglas to get Mr. Heaton removed to some other neighbourhood. He can do it if he chooses. He has plenty of interest; let Mr. Heaton have another living!"

"My dear mother! Do you consider that Torrieburn is Mrs. Heaton's home? Do you suppose she would consent?"

"Who asks her consent? You really are too young to be rocked in a cradle, Lorimer. Let Mr. Heaton find her a home; where he goes, she can go. That young neer-do-well, Kenneth, is of age; indeed, he must now be two and twenty, or more. How is he to bring a wife (if ever he does anything so decent as take one) to live with that red-haired flaunting Jezebel?"

"Ah, mother; cease the abuse of that poor soul! It pains me always, that barking of one woman's mouth against another, and it pains me doubly, trebly, when I hear it from my mother's lips." He paused, and added hurriedly—"Douglas took his wife—took Gertrude—to call at Torrieburn."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself; and *she* ought to be ashamed to hold up her head among honest women."

"Who?"

"Lady Ross. I, for one, have little desire to see her, if she keeps such company."

A short scornful laugh, followed by a sigh from the very depth of his discontented heart, was all Lorimer's reply.

Between him and that gaunt fierce mother rose the soft blushing vision of Gertrude,—Gertrude, shy, passionate, pitiful, womanly,—Gertrude, fond and loving. If

ever *she* had sons, could there come a day when her son would feel as he did now?

Oh! mothers, and wives, and sisters, and daughters,—never let a man, connected with you by the nearest and dearest links that God can establish between His creatures, compare you with other women, and find you so wanting in all women's best attributes, that his heart aches at the result of his comparison!

While Lorimer Boyd, lost in painful thought, slowly reached his hat and prepared to depart, the door of the dark oaken room where they sat suddenly opened, and Alice Ross appeared in the light on the threshold. She was agitated,—obviously agitated; and Lorimer, who was accustomed to all her artificial ways, looked at her now with startled curiosity.

"What is the matter?" said Lady Clochnaben, sharply; showing that to her also Alice's manner appeared to betoken something unusual, as she stood, pale and quiet, in her grey riding-habit.

"We want help. Douglas is in the glen with a man—a man who has fainted; quite a young man; he began telling us the circumstances, but he fainted away. He has escaped from confinement in some Roman Catholic college, where the priests held him for punishment. And he was making his way south; but he has taken so little nourishment that he could not get on."

"There!" said Lady Clochnaben, triumphantly, "*that* comes of your teachers and preachers like Mr. Heaton. Send down some of my people to the glen: and you Lorimer, come with me. Will you take anything, Alice?"

No. Alice did not want anything for herself: but would it not be better to take some refreshment or stimulant to the man in the glen? He might be dying. He seemed very ill. She spoke with her usual drawl, but her eyes gleamed.

To the glen the whole party proceeded; and there, somewhat recovered from his fainting fit, and leaning exhausted against the bole of a tree, they found the stranger, attended by Sir Douglas. Alice's sure-footed pony was placed at his service, Alice herself mounting Sir Douglas's horse; and the rest of the group returned slowly, keeping company with the riders.

Arrived at Clochnaben, the young man, so opportunely assisted, entered into full explanation of his unfortunate position. A convert from the Roman Catholic faith, he had intended entering orders, if possible, in England; but, on returning to the college where he had been educated, he was de-

tained, threatened, cajoled, and again menaced. He was finally put into durance, where he had remained six weeks, daily visited by the priests, and urged to return to the real fold. Escaping, during a wild stormy night, by the romantic expedient of catching hold of a branch that swung past the window of the chapel where he had been permitted to attend a midnight mass, he descended to the glen, by following the course of the rocky river which divided the lands of Clochnaben from the secluded spot where the obnoxious seminary was situated, and which indeed was little more than a substantial farm-house and outbuildings, to which a chapel and surrounding stone walls had been attached.

Six weeks of a diet approaching starvation; in confined air; tormented by exhortations and watching, and forbidden ever to recline even for an hour's rest, had so reduced him, that he was unable at length to do more than crawl into what appeared to him the vicinity of fellow-creatures. He described very graphically the dreadful mixture of hope and fear with which he beheld, high above and beyond him, the grey towers with scattered lights, standing up in the night, while he lay helpless on the earth; and the sensations produced in his mind by the slow approach of the sound of horses' feet leisurely coming onwards, till the re-appearing sight of the grey habit of Alice and the stately form of Sir Douglas emerged into view from the woods. He desired only a day or two's hospitality till he could communicate with friends in Shropshire, who would arrange for his return to them; and in a very gentlemanlike and natural manner he thanked the persons round him earnestly for his rescue. "I think," said he, "if I had not fallen in with Christian friends just when I did, I was in such a state of exhaustion that I should have succumbed to it, and you would have had to conjecture respecting the stray corpse of an apparently starved man, instead of assisting a living one."

He smiled faintly as he spoke; and his countenance, meagre as it was with suffering, was far from unpleasant. Large dark intelligent eyes, looking larger from the ex-

treme hollowness of his cheeks, and a costume rather in the style that is termed "shabby genteel," prepossessed the female portion of the group in his favour; and gaunt Lady Clochnaben condescended, after a pause, to command "the red room" to be got ready for him; observing, with very obvious truth, that Glenrosie was a good way off, and, as the young man was then in the very grounds of Clochnaben he might just as well remain there. Alice, Lady Clochnaben also invited to stay the night, by way of company for the stranger. Sir Douglas rode home, with the story of their morning's adventure to interest Gertrude; and Lorimer executed his intention of seeking the inmates of Torrieburn, and hearing their reasons for supposing the Clochnaben people had anything to do with the dangerous act of malice directed against the safety and comfort of Mr. Saville Heaton.

The "red-haired Jezebel," whose warm golden locks were still as blowzy as in the morning visit to the irate dowager, and her ample bust still heaving with hysterical remainder of past sobs — was greatly touched by the courtesy and kindness of Lorimer Boyd's manner, and the interest and sympathy he showed in the unwarrantable attack made upon them. But, if she could have torn gaunt Lady Clochnaben to pieces with her wild white arms, she certainly would not have shown much mercy; and the extraordinary vehemence with which she kept striking her own knees, in avvil fashion, with her well-shaped hands doubled as if for boxing, half amused and half irritated Lorimer while talking to her. So did the remarks she did not scruple to make on his mother; seeming entirely to forget the relationship, and, with a confused reference to her narrow stock of books and their subjects, calling that lofty dowager "Auld Jack the Giant-Killer," and the

"Bogle-bo o' Billy Myre,
Wha kills the bairns a'."

But a yet greater disturbance of Maggie's peace (if Maggie ever knew the word peace) was to come.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRANGER PREACHES A SERMON.

By the wide hearth in the reception-room of Clochnaben Castle—where a fire of pinewood and coal had been kindled to baffle the chill summer evening, and where heavy woollen curtains of tartan were drawn across the deep narrow embrasures of the old-fashioned windows sunk in the stone walls—sat, greatly comforted and much at his ease, in spite of the stiffness of shape of his high-backed chair, the hero of that adventure in the glen. Opposite to him, in two similarly high-backed chairs, sat Alice Ross and Lady Clochnaben. The words “lounges” and “recline” were not in her ladyship’s vocabulary: and if, in the privacy of her lone turret-chamber at Glenrossie, Alice relapsed into cushions and softness, at all events in the Dowager’s presence she preserved that attitude which alone was considered decent or fit for a well-bred female.

She sat, then, bolt-upright, her little pale hands folded in her lap, looking furtively at the stranger: furtively and askance.

And Lady Clochnaben also looked at him: not at all furtively, but, on the contrary, with a scrutinizing and contemplative stare; as if, having warmed and fed him, she was now merely exercising a natural right of inspection of the stray creature found on her lands. If the young man was conscious of the double inspection, he did not show it. His great luminous eyes were fixed abstractedly on the fire, wide and unwinking, as if they drank in the light. A somewhat hectic colour had succeeded his paleness and exhaustion, making his eyes seem still brighter, and the cheek-bones more prominent. The mouth of that strange meagre face was its only defective feature. It was at once hard and sensual—hard, in spite of the full contour of the lips, and the submissive smile with which he answered all her questions his grim hostess was pleased to put to him. A Portuguese sort of mouth: something apish in the form and expression of the jaw.

With respect to her questionings, Lady Clochnaben “*ne se gêna pas*.” She asked whatever it came into her head to ask—his age, his parentage, his name, his tastes and occupations, his means of living, his chances of aid from relations or friends, his hopes for the future, his adventures in the past. And, though all these questions were answered with the smoothest readiness, it

was astonishing how very vague and incomplete, after all, was the impression left on the hearer’s mind. Beyond the fact that his name was James Frere, his family belonging to Shropshire, and his strongest desire on earth to become a missionary preacher, and do good in his generation—“yea, even by the extremest sacrifice,”—Lady Clochnaben could not say she had learnt anything which had not been told, without questioning, when he was recovering from his fainting fit in the glen that morning.

After a while she inquired whether he was a rapid accountant. Yes; he believed he was very quick at figures. Could he draw? Yes, he could draw in a poor way: he had not studied: he had amused himself with pen-and-ink etching now and then, and architectural sketches. Willing to utilize these gifts, the gaunt old lady informed him she desired to build an addition to the castle towards the brow of the precipitous rock on which it was erected, and “would be glad of any suggestion on paper,” he could give as to the building, and any approximate calculation of expense: at the same time opening a blotting-book, and putting that, and pens and ink, ready for him.

Mr. James Frere did not refuse; he rose from his high-backed chair, and courteously advanced to the table. Alice had taken her work. As he passed her he slightly paused. “What curious work,” he said: “what is it? What a beautiful glossy material!”

“I am making nets of chenille—it is very soft,” said pussy-cat Alice; and she held one of the hanks up for examination. For an instant he touched it with his long attenuated fingers; and her eyes followed them. She drew Lady Clochnaben’s attention, in a low under-tone, to a remarkable scar on the back of his hand, as he sat down to his architectural task.

“You have been badly hurt some time,” said the grim hostess, pointing to the scar with little ceremony.

Mr. James Frere paused for a moment in his etching, glanced at his hand, and said quietly, “Yes, it was a knife.”

But he volunteered no further information.

It was a knife. Was it a penance, or an attack, or what? Alice felt curious. She mused as she twisted the soft chenille; and, so musing, and seeing from under the narrowed lids of her eyes that Lady Clochnaben was also considering, and not looking her way, but sternly contemplating her own

foot as it rested on the edge of the fender, she ventured a furtive examination once more of the hand and its owner.

But, just as her cautious glance had travelled from the hand to the downcast brow of the sketcher, he suddenly lifted his head, and turning his broad, bright, intelligent gaze full on her face, met the eyes that were stealthily creeping towards him, as if he had flashed a lantern on her pale features and sandy hair. Alice was not embarrassed. She never was embarrassed. Many a girl in her place would have blushed and laughed, or blushed, without laughing. Alice merely smiled; a little grave odd smile, a sort of tacit admission, — "Well, *I was* looking at you; and what of that?"

The young stranger smiled also; and whereas, a very few minutes before, Alice had been reflecting that he would make a good study for a picture of John the Baptist in the wilderness, it suddenly seemed to her that it was rather an insolent smile, from a countenance anything but religious or, ascetic, but, to her taste, extremely handsome.

And, as both smiles died away, Alice resumed her cautious demureness in the high-backed chair; and the hard-set lines round Mr. Frere's mouth seemed to deepen in intensity, as he once more bent over the writing-table.

The silence which followed was broken by Lady Clochnaben.

"Mr. Frere," she said, "did you ever preach?"

This time the readiness of answer seemed in abeyance for a few seconds. Then, in a low steady voice, he replied, "Never; I never ventured."

"*Could* you preach?"

"Of course, I suppose that I could; the grace of God assisting."

"As to the grace of God, it's 'help yourself, and heaven will help you,' — that's my dictum. Some can preach, and some can't, — who may be very good men for all that. But I want a man who *can* preach. I have been thinking" — and here the dowager frowned yet more sternly at the foot planted on the fender, — "I have, I say, been thinking that you might be of great use in this distracted place; and, if you've any spirit, you might just drive out those that never should have been here at all. And I'll tell you what it is, young sir: if I thought that you'd undertake it, you're welcome to stay here, up at the castle, as long as ever it suits ye to remain, until that desirable consummation should come about."

This somewhat discursive and involved reasoning being further explained by the Dowager Clochnaben, it became clear to her attentive guest that what was expected of him was, so to bewitch the small world to which she would introduce him, that he should oust Mr. Saville Heaton from the hearts and ears of his already dwindling congregation, and "put him to silence" by the very simple process of leaving him without listeners in the parish.

And, in the meanwhile, the meagre and persecuted hero of the glen was to live at the castle "as long as it suited him;" unclaimed by his Shropshire friends.

The hand that had that conspicuous scar on it, idly clasped and unclasped the paper knife on the table, and balanced it lightly, while the stranger listened to these proposals.

"I will exert what poor gifts I may have next Sabbath, if your ladyship pleases. Is no church, but on the brow of this rocky hill, where I have met with such signal deliverance; and at no set time of other preaching, — for that would be an unseemly, and, as I am at present situated, a probably unsuccessful, rivalry. But just in the interval, — when a discourse might be listened to without offence, — if your ladyship could give such notice as seems good to you, and likely to serve the end you have in view, I would do my best for the glory of my Heavenly Master, and leave the result to His mercy."

So it was settled that Mr. Frere should preach; and the notice the grim woman gave — heightened with every detail of romance respecting the religious persecution to which he had been subjected by "Satan and his priests," and favoured by the ever-ready curiosity of the congregations to hear "a shred o' the doctrine" from new lips — brought together as large a crowd as the three neighbourhoods of Glenrossie, Torriebar, and Clochnaben could furnish.

Nor was the success of the stranger doubtful. A voice more powerful and musical — more practised in its ready reflections, its tones of warning, of tenderness, of deprecation — never addressed a group of fellow-men. As to the matter of his discourse — it was strange, ingenious, and occasionally marred by what the more educated portion of his hearers might think to be taste. Yet even that seemed a calculation, and intended to rouse attention among the poorer auditory. And he was right; images and illustrations which to the cultivated seemed absurd, to the uncultivated were often merely striking. It is astonishing how

little apparent to such minds is that which we term "the grotesque." There had been an expectation that he would dwell on his personal history and sufferings, and reveal the dark "secrets of the prison-house" whence he had escaped. But no such egotistical preface ushered in his theme. After a brief, fervent allusion of thankfulness for the rescue which had made his opportunity of addressing them, he passed to his text, which had no connecting link with such matters. It was, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" And nothing could be more pathetic or impressive than his appeal to "the hearts that fall asleep," to wake, bestir themselves, and devote their energies in good time to God; nothing more appalling than the picture he drew of "the time to come," when it should be "too late" for energy; too late for repentance; when the sluggish heart might "sleep on and take its rest," God and good angels departing from it for ever! The divergence from his actual argument was in the occasion he took to lay stress on the scene in which this text of warning had first been given — *in the garden* — the garden where Christ habitually walked with His disciples; and from thence he lectured discursively and vehemently in favour of open-air meetings and hill-preachings, and against all "enclosed and decorated places," and "idolatrous temples and such like," as sinful and offensive. He said Christ, who had taught in the Temple, was yet remembered best by the "Sermon on the Mount" and the "Agony in the Garden;" that He had preached "on the pathless shore, and on the rolling waves of the ever-restless sea, and in the sandy and unproductive desert, where the very bread and fishes that were to sustain life in his hearers had to be miraculously multiplied — so far away were they from human habitation and the help of man's work. Yea," he said, "the very law of God Himself was given to Moses on the bare mountain — 'and out of a bush — out of a bush — He spake in His thunders!'"

And so the gardens, and the wilds, and the bushes, and the hills, and the great gray old olive-trees, and the palms, whose gathered branches were scattered under Christ's feet, were dearer to God than any work or carving of man's hand, and more acceptable than all the painted playthings of his skill. And the use of such decorated and covered places as were now the sinful fashion, was calculated to corrupt the spiritual meaning of adoration, to teach men to pray only when they could do so softly and

conveniently; to encourage mincing women in rich clothing to attend merely when it was not too cold, or too wet, or too windy, in their opinion, for indolent homage to their Maker.

And then suddenly, as it were, carried away by his subject, he burst forth in a sort of rapture about prayers and burials at sea; and souls accepted "even on the blood-stained herbage of the battle-field;" and from the graphic image of sailors in an open boat at midnight, drifting away from their burning ship without food or compass, "relying on the Lord," he passed to the historic tradition of the night-service read by one army while the other was carousing, and the victory that followed; winding up all with a word-picture, as vivid as ever was painted, of a dying soldier left by unconscious comrades among a scattered heap of the moon-lighted slain, and saying his final prayer to God alone and unattended; "needing no temple but the starry vault of heaven open to his upturned eyes, and, after the great din of war, and the thrill of the trumpet, hearing no music but the wind sighing through the darkened trees — that plaintive monotone in the great hymn of life which for ever, and till this world shall shrivel like a scroll, goeth up from all things created to the Creator of all."

And with this image and these words the musical and resounding voice died down into silence, and there was a slow dispersion of the crowd: young men and maidens, old men and crones, going dreamily away; children looking timidly about, as though Moses lived in those surrounding tufts of broom and heather; men in folded plaids and Hieland bonnets, pronouncing it a "varry grand discourse," and Lady Clochnaben, with a grim, triumphant smile, standing still by the preacher's side, but not looking at him — looking rather towards her son Lorimer, who had passed his arm through that of Sir Douglas preparatory to departure — and to the sinner of Torriéburn, who had not only dared to listen to a religious "discourse," but was now actually giving her opinion on it, in that loud jaunty manner which she adopted to show her independence.

And Maggie's opinion was, that there were "ow'r muckle words for folk to follow," and that Mr. Frere was, to her thinking, "like the pail o' milk gotten frae Leddy Grace, ane o' the black kye, that just aye frothit, and brimmit ow'r. And aae, my mon, dinna ye be dooncast, for your Sabbath discourses are no that wearyfu', though whiles they mak' me a bit sleepy;" and she

laid her large comely hand on Saville Heaton's shoulder as she spoke. And, in token of consciousness of the light burden this imposed, Mr. Heaton put his own hand over Maggie's — not indeed as returning the ill-timed caress, but rather as a hand is laid on the head of a favourite dog, to keep it still while the owner is conversing with friends; and he then addressed himself to Mr. Boyd.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KITH-AND-KIN LOVE.

"I CANNOT help thinking it improbable," said Mr Heaton, diffidently, while still suppressing Maggie's hand, "that this is Mr. Frere's first preaching. He has much eloquence — and — and much courage."

"I entirely agree with you, Mr. Heaton; it is even impossible, in my opinion. The man is a very practised speaker; and I am tolerably sure that I have heard him before, years ago, — somewhere abroad, though I cannot clearly call to mind where or when. I think he must be an Irishman. The style he has adopted, and his whole appearance, favour that supposition. I never heard a voice that ran up and down the gamut in that way that was not Irish, nor ever heard the same fluency in men of any other nation."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Boyd," said the voice of Alice Ross. "He told us himself that he was of a Shropshire family, and he is too young to have preached anywhere years ago, for he has not yet attained to his twenty-fifth birthday."

The deliberate drawl with which Miss Ross always spoke was not quickened by any emotion in this little defence. On the contrary, there was something peculiarly slow and tight in her utterance of these sentences, as though she were strangling Lorimer's opinion in its cradle. But sharp gleams of indignation came from her eyes, like the electric sparks from Grimalkin's fur; brilliant, and equally evanescent.

"Is Sister Ailie charmed with the new preacher?" said Sir Douglas, smiling. "He is just the sort of man to hit a lady's fancy. But, indeed," added he, earnestly, "I do wrong to utter a light word on the subject. He is a very remarkable young man, very remarkable; and I cannot doubt but that his best hopes will be fulfilled, and that he will, indeed, be most useful in his generation! Suffering is a good school. No one can look at him and not see that he has suffered much. I long to do him a kindness, if

it were at all in my power. I hope to see much of him. It is not often one meets with such a man. As to Lorimer's idea of having seen him before, fancies of that sort come to us all; and about his age, with those beardless men it is very difficult to calculate; they constantly look either very much younger or very much older than they are. Take my arm, Ailie; you seem tired." And, while Saville Heaton and Lorimer walked on in front, talking eagerly together, Alice and stately Sir Douglas followed: sitting down now and then on the bank of heather, that Alice's fatigue might not be increased: resting in the open air: in sweeter rest than ever is found on silks couch or cushioned *fauteuil*; the mist streamlet bubbling and trickling down the hill, laughing its silver laugh amid the stones, and that and the "sough" among the incense-breathing pines making indeed a sweet chord in that hymn, — which Mr Frere had impressed on Miss Ross's memory.

And it was during this walk with her half-brother that Alice held with him a remarkable conversation — one that he could not forget, one which in after times the recollection of a fern leaf, or the notes of the thrush's song, or the sight of a harebell among the dry grass, — in short, the most trivial accidental things — would bring back to him if her words were but just spoken, and his pale irregular profile were still between him and the evening sky.

For it was not often that Alice and Sir Douglas held long *tête-à-tête* colloquies. He was a busy landlord; an attached husband; a companionable friend to his associates; a tolerably studious reader, though no bookworm. He had neither time, — nor, if truth is to be spoken, the thought, — to bestow on her.

And "Ailie" knew it. She knew it was the last and the least of his thoughts kindly as he was; and therefore she made the most of her rare opportunities when she got them.

I wonder if women who are "first objects" in some large and happy home circle — or even "first objects" to the objects they themselves love, — ever ruminate on the condition of one who is nobody's first object. How lone in the midst of company such a one must feel! What silence to her under all their talking and laughing! What strange disruption from the link-chain that holds all the rest together! What exile, though ever present! What starvation of soul, in the midst of all those great shares of love meted out around her!

Ailie was not social by nature; nor is

ing; nor yearning for love: but she was conscious of loneliness, and resented the pain.

With a skill of which she only had the mastery, she led, little by little, back to that implication of being "charmed" by James Frere which her half-brother had lightly passed over, fearing to wound even by that gentle jest.

You could never know how Ailie managed this sort of thing. She had some private Ariadne's clue; by means of which, if she wished to escape from discussion of a subject, pursue it as you would, she was out through the labyrinth where you remained, and free in space.

If, on the other hand, you desired to avoid touching some topic of risk and discomfort, it was in vain you retreated from it. Through the intricate passages of thought, into your very heart of hearts, came Ailie and her clue, and sat down victor over your intended privacy. How she crept back, softly and soundlessly, along the parapet, and up the roof, and in at the window of Sir Douglas's thoughts, and recommenced a little discussion and defence, respecting the possibility of her being "charmed" by one "so much a stranger" as Mr. James Frere, the warm-hearted soldier could not have told; but he remembered for ever the singular wind-up of Ailie's denials of such a possibility.

"Not only," she said, "I do not think that I should be easily charmed by a stranger (after all — lone as my life has been — I have, of course, had my opportunities, and can test myself in *that*); but I am just incapable of conceiving those romantic loves and nonsenses that I read of in books, and hear of; and they just go by like a false dream! It well may be *because* I have been so lonely, but to my thinking there can be no love, no tie, like love and tie of kith and kin. Do you not think?" — and here she turned slowly round, and looked up wistfully in her half-brother's face — "do you not think that, where there is to the making of us the very same flesh and blood and spirit, the tie must be stronger for love? stronger than mere fancy, or even approval, or attachment, that way that the books put it? For love may change (and we read *that* too), and it may prove false (and there's many an old ballad *to that*), and it is a jealous restless thing, by what I can make out (and I declare I often think of it when I try to please Lady Ross, and try to imagine if I should object even to a sister being too much to a man that was all in all to me); but in kith-and-

kin love, there need be none of all that. Kith-and-kin love, is *sure*. You can't change from being the same flesh and blood; and though, of course, I've heard of sister and brother's quarrels and coldness, I think surely it never could last, to part them as common love does; and I think — if I had had an own brother, as I have only a half-brother" — she spoke it with a most plaintive drawl — "I think — indeed I am perfectly positive — I should have loved that brother better than any man that crossed my path of life, let that man be what he might. For, oh! dear, you'll never know how much I've thought, even about *you*, and wondered if ever you'd come home to stay, and what kith-and-kin love would be like for me! Many a day, in the little turret room, I've looked to it, and perhaps foolishly, for God made me but an insignificant creature, and you'd need a sister with more fire and strength in her before she could be much to you! But, still, I'll not be easily 'charmed' away, Douglas, and that you'll find."

The tone was so grave and sad; the slender form sat so stiff and still; the eyes, though wistful, were so without the expectation or possibility of tears; it was all so unlike either girlish sentimentality or passionate woman's *epanchement*, that it was difficult to know how to take, or how to answer it.

Difficult, at least, to Sir Douglas.

And, as the echo of all she said, rolled after the spoken sentences from his ear into his easy heart, he thought with what touching innocence his poor little lonely half-sister spoke of love and being charmed, as a thing she had heard of, read of, sung old ballads about, but of which she had no personal experience — how her one sole notion was kith-and-kin love, — which was to be her all in all, — and he was greatly moved! He folded Alice in his arms as they rose to continue their walk homewards, and then he said, — "My dear little woman, my poor Ailie, the natural life of your sex is to be all in all to some true mate, and not to depend altogether on what you call 'kith and kin' love: — but of this be quite sure, that you shall always find in me the love of an own brother, not of a half-brother; you shall tell me your joys and sorrows, and thoughts and feelings, as you have done this day; and when you are 'charmed' (as I can't help hoping for you, some day, Ailie), I'll love that man, if he is worthy of you, and treats you tenderly, as your sweet nature requires to be treated, — as if he also

was my born brother, and nearer my own soul than any one except my Kenneth of old boyish days."

And so they walked home; very silent, both of them. Only, when they came in sight of the turrets of Glenrossie, Sir Douglas pointed up to her little nook with a kindly smile, and, pressing her slender passive hands in his own, said, — "You will never feel so lonely there again, will you? You will know some of my thoughts are always with you."

And, when Ailie had lightly ascended that stair, and curled herself softly round in her *causeuse* (that chair so little resembling the prevailing pattern at Clachnaben), and flung round her shoulders an eider-down tippet to prevent taking cold after her walk, — she felt —

That she had had a successful day's mousing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

HONEST Sir Douglas went straight to his wife's apartment; a sunny sitting-room, still farther illumined for him by the smile of intense love and welcome which he knew he should meet whenever he opened the door. It had been furnished very gaily, and in somewhat foreign taste, in pursuance of orders sent to Glenrossie before the bride's arrival. Gertrude and he had talked together of the gloomy grandeur of some of the Scotch castles; the naked, barren, well-to-do-ish appearance given by slated roofs and stone walls in mearer Scotch abodes; and the hungry, positive, prosaic, gardenless rows of small houses, that could not be called "cottages," in Scotch villages, that looked like pieces of uncomfortable towns carted out into the country. They had laughed together, as they sat among the orange-trees and roses of the Villa Mandorlo, at Naples, over his warnings and hopes that Gertrude would refrain and command herself, and not behave like Mary Queen of Scots, who is said to have burst into tears on arriving at the grim gates of Holyrood, whither a group of unkempt Shetland ponies had conveyed her and her attendant ladies.

Gertrude loved her rough hill-pony, and her Scotch castle, and all things in Scotland. There was music for her in the very accent of its warmhearted and energetic people. Nor did she greatly care for the pomps and vanities of life. But, neverthe-

less, she was glad of her beautiful morning room. It was not its luxury that she enjoyed, so much as its brightness, and its dear knowledge of all the tender forethought its little details had proved. She never entered it without recollecting the glow of pleasure on her husband's handsome countenance, at her amazement and joy, when he ushered her into it the morning after her arrival. She saw it still, that vanished morning's light! The opening door — the unexpected loveliness — and his face, the face of her beloved, when, turning from the irradiated *tout ensemble* — pale green Anbusson carpets and curtains wreathed with roses; glittering tables where stood crystal flower-vases, enamelled with his crest and her name; great golden herons with silver-fish in their beaks, making candelabra stands almost as tall as herself; and a crowd of minor objects, every one a thought of love; — turning from all these, she thanked him with almost childish exclamations of delight, repeated with clasped hands, and again repeated more gravely, with deeper emotions of gratitude. She loved that happy room!

And Sir Douglas loved it too, and stood at its threshold now, welcomed by the smile he knew so well, and which he thought the most lovely upon earth. For in smiling is there such a difference. There are women who smile only with their lips; and there are others whose eyes, and brow, and lips beam altogether with such a cordial glow of brightness, that it is difficult to believe an extra gleam of light does not fall at such times even upon their burnished hair.

That was the sort of smile Gertrude gave; tinged with a certain lingering shyness, in spite of security and familiarity of love. In natures like hers, intense love is always timid.

Sir Douglas talked with her, and anxiously of her health; for she had not been able to accompany them that afternoon; and then he spoke of "Ailie," earnestly pressed on Gertrude his views of his half-sister's character and feelings; repeating, with a colour taken from his own warmth of heart, the impressions of her innocence, her reserve, her yearnings for kindred. "She requires, — see, my own Gertrude, to be drawn out to be encouraged; in fact, to be petted and made much of. I was much moved by what she said to-day — she so seldom speaks of herself and her feelings. They are so rarely upon it; but she has never had companions, never had any one to confide

I am sure, if you could once grow to be fond of her, you would possess her utmost love and confidence. She is diffident as to her power of attracting, and very young of her age; it seems quite the heart of a young girl, though she has so much information and womanly sense. *Pet* her a little, Gertrude; *pet* her, my own dear wife!"

And as the dressing-bell rang through the last words, Sir Douglas rose, and left the beautiful room, and the sweet surprised face, and departed to his own chamber.

Lady Ross did not immediately betake herself to her toilette; though she was conscious of the vista (through another door that opened as the dressing-bell rang) of her maid moving in front of the looking-glass, and of a pale peach-coloured silk hanging up ready to put on; a dress with which she always wore a necklace of a single row of Scotch pearls given by Sir Douglas.

She did not begin to dress. She sat looking, rather abstractedly, at all the objects in her beautiful morning-room from which the rich twilight was now rapidly departing, — for even *that* room, of course, must have its night and its hours of darkness.

"*Pet* Alice!"

Again and again she thought the words over, and the eager tender manner of Sir Douglas while urging it.

"*Pet*" Alice! The young wife strove to drive away little stinging haunting memories of coldness, and slyness, and hardness, and alien ways, which had seemed to her to be component parts of her sister-in-law's character. Something very like a shudder thrilled through Gertrude. Was he wrong? Could Douglas be wrong? Had she herself been harsh in judgment? Could she judge well and wisely of a person who from childhood had been denied, what she herself from childhood had enjoyed, — tenderness, freedom of affection, frank and fearless expression of all passing thoughts? Lorimer Boyd, it was true, thought ill of Alice. He had said she was "a creature full of harm." But Lorimer was cynical. Yes; lovable in himself; a true and faithful friend; but cynical in his judgments of others. And not happy in his home relations. What a mother! What a brother! Enough to sour any man's judgments.

"*Pet* Alice!" What was the use of arguing about that, in her own mind? Ought it not to be enough for her that *Douglas wished it*? If he brought her a toad, and begged her to keep it in her room and make a plaything of it, would she not do it? What had Alice's deserts to do with the

matter? Douglas wished his sister to be petted — DOUGLAS wished it!

And with that last thought Gertrude started up, and passed quickly into the inner dressing-room, where the maid and the peach-coloured gown were waiting; and had her hair coiled round very simply (there being such abridged dressing time), and clasped the collar of pearls round her white throat, just as Sir Douglas came to accompany her downstairs.

Alice was already there; and Lorimer; and Mr. Saville Heaton, who had remained to dine.

And, even in the few minutes that intervened before the gray-headed old butler announced dinner, Gertrude began her "*petting*" of Alice. She glided towards her with a kindly smile, and asked if she had liked her walk, if she had liked the preaching of Mr. Frere, if she had been tired in the long ramble home? And, while her frank soft eyes questioned with her tongue, Alice gave a sidelong calculating glance; at Lady Ross's shoulder, at her necklace, at the graceful folds of her gown — anywhere but directly in her face.

"She looked askance at Cristabel, — Jesu Maria shield her well!"

And while she looked askance, she calculated; and with so much quickness and intelligence did she sum up all, that only in the passing down the broad oaken stair to the stately dining-room she found time to say to her half-brother, on whose arm she went into dinner — "I am sure you have been speaking of me to Lady Ross, her manner is so very, *very* much kinder to me than usual, even when we are all comfortable together. But do not try to *make* people kind to me. I am quite pleased and contented. Perhaps it might even offend. I should not like to seem troublesome."

And then she sat down in her usual place, between Douglas and Lorimer, her thin still mouth looking as if silence was habitual to it. Only when Lady Ross tried to talk a little more to her than usual, and more gaily and familiarly, she allowed a sort of imperceptible shade of vexation and embarrassment to gather round it before she replied; and once, only once, she looked at Sir Douglas with a little vague dry smile and shrug of the shoulders, as much as to say, "This is your doing; I cannot help myself. I hope it will not make me a burden, or make them dislike me."

But Sir Douglas's thoughts were much preoccupied. He was considering about his

friend Lorimer; he had fallen back on the idea that *there* was the natural suitable destiny for Alice, and for Boyd! His friend could not want a very young wife; such a one would not suit him. (It is astonishing how much more clearly this sort of conviction of mature age comes in judging one's neighbour's destiny than judging of one's own.) Alice was very sensible — rather original — just the thing. And Lorimer was sure to be Earl of Clochnaben some day, and they would all be neighbours and friends and brothers! It was a most glorious castle in the air — the fit and appropriate end of all!

But, alas! how recalcitrant is man — above all when friends (or foes) desire to bestow him in wedlock. How often does one see some beautiful married woman the object of a compromising adoration which she does not share — which she would give her alternate eyelashes to be rid of — for which she is bullied and anathematized by the mother, sisters, and cousins of her adorer, to say nothing of some girl or girls who wish to wed him; and yet there is no bringing him “to a sense of his situation!” How often does one see the like obstinate pursuit and courtship of some young damsel, who, to use a familiar phrase of scorn, “wouldn’t so much as look at” the suitor, while some other young damsel is sighing her heart out for him, and folding up as a secret treasure a shabby little withered sprig he gave her one evening while handing her through a quadrille. And he won’t — no, he *won’t* — see what is good for him; but, in the case of the married idol, persists in breaking his heart for glimpses of a person who don’t want to see him at all; and, in the case of the young damsel, in resolutely wooing one who cannot be persuaded to wed him! All, apparently, out of sheer contradiction; as though marriageable man resembled the Connaught pig of whom the Irishman said he was obliged to pretend he wanted him to go to Cork, in order to make him take the road to Dublin! Sir Douglas certainly seemed to think there was a Connaught piggishness of obstinate avoidance of the right path in “dear old Lorimer.”

He could not go up to the man, take him by the button, and advise him, point-blank, to marry his sister; but all that could be done, in a decent, gentlemanly way, he was willing and anxious to do, and to persuade Gertrude to do also.

Poor Gertrude! How was she to explain to him that Alice was rather an object of aversion than otherwise to Mr. Boyd?

“That he thought her “a creature full of harm?”

After dinner, too, how provokingly absorbed was Lorimer in some discussion with Mr. Seville Heaton; who was not a clever man; who was generally a shy and slow man; and, who was now — as it were — of positive ill-luck and thwarting of Sir Douglas's secret wishes — carrying on what seemed to be an earnest continuous argument, to which Lorimer gave the most assiduous attention; and, indeed, ended by taking out a note-book, asking for “Cruden's Concordance,” and making memoranda which he handed to Mr. Heaton. Then, flinging aside the heavy crimson curtains of the window, looked out steadily and absently at the star-lit heaven and the lake far away, as though the text he sought for in Cruden had been those words of mystery, — “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?”

He had not even seemed to notice (except by a mechanical and courteous inclination of the head) that it was Alice who brought the “Concordance,” and laid it on the table where the two gentlemen were seated; though Sir Douglas “improved the opportunity,” by saying, “Oh! Alice! where every book in the library is to be found; I believe she could select them in the dark.”

When asked if he would not take off his coat, he declined, without lifting his eyes from the page; and the tea-table was deserted except by the two ladies, between whom conversation continued fitful and disjointed. The more caressing Gertrude endeavoured to be, the more dry and curt Alice became, till, at one point of their discursing, she looked at Lady Ross with an expression of covert ridicule, that startled hostess blushed, and ceased to speak. In another second, the pallid face of Alice was so placid, so “without form and void,” that Gertrude thought she must have been in a waking dream to imagine her previous look had meant anything.

She felt ill and weary, and feverish with the feverishness of one who has gone through that uphill task, *trying* to be pleasant and companionable to a companion unwelcome and ungenial. But she did not like to give the signal for retiring. Douglas might have shortened the evening for Alice.

At length Lorimer Boyd turned from the reading of the stars, and, advancing into the room, actually seated himself by the side of Alice Ross, and entered into conversation with her; principally, as was but nat-

on the subject of Mr. James Frere's preaching, his adventures, and his account of himself.

"Well," said Lorimer, carelessly, "no one can deny that he has what my countrymen familiarly call 'the gift o' the gab,' and I hope he may always make a good use of it. One advantage he certainly has: the most melodious voice I think I ever heard. That is a perfection quite independent of eloquence."

Gertrude looked suddenly up from her work, and smiled tenderly at the speaker. She was thinking that he himself possessed the advantage he was praising in another, and how often she had heard the sweet even tones repeated aloud to amuse her dying father.

Her look was full of fondness, and Alice saw it; and saw the gloom deepen instead of lessen in Lorimer's countenance, when she spoke out her thought and said, as the tender smile died away, "Do you remember how my dear father loved to hear you read on that account?"

"Yes," said Sir Douglas, I remember" even as a boy, thinking Lorimer's the pleasantest voice in the world."

"I will immediately learn to sing," said Mr. Boyd, with a forced smile, "and have a 'Maitre Corbeau' adventure. But, meanwhile," added he, abruptly, "our friend, Mr. Heaton, is going to exert his voice. We have been agreeing that he shall endeavour to raise a collection for the schools near Torrieburn, which are sadly in want of funds; and I hope all that has occurred will not prevent a good attendance and a good collection, and that Mr. James Frere may not utterly monopolize the attention of the inhabitants of these regions, though there seems some danger of his doing so."

If Gertrude's smile was singularly bright and sweet, Lorimer's was not. It was a smile that made you wince and look grave, and Alice did not like it.

"I shall certainly be present at Mr. Heaton's discourse," she said, "with my brother and Lady Ross."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. SAVILLE HEATON ALSO PREACHES.

MR. SAVILLE HEATON had not the natural advantages which distinguished Mr. Frere. His voice was rather weak, and an occasional hesitation, which was not exactly a stammer, induced a repetition of words just pronounced, as if he had not been satisfied with the way in which they were delivered; and sometimes gave that appearance of confusion which may be observed when a person reading aloud loses his place on the page.

But on this occasion he was more fluent than usual: and even Maggie half refrained from her customary slumbers, and shifted her large ignorant blue eyes with a certain complacency from one to another of the immediate auditors, as though ascertaining what effect her "mon's" discourse had on their minds.

It was a very simple straightforward sermon, after all; with now and then a gleam of eloquence, and now and then an unexpected metaphor, and always a glow of real earnestness about it: on the hackneyed text, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,"—illustrated with the obvious lines of argument as to the various motives for "giving in charity," as it is called,—the ambition to be thought well of by men,—the superstitious hope to atone by good works for evil deeds, as of old great robbers built fine churches; on which principle Milan Cathedral is traditionally said to have been founded; being begun by a penitent nephew, in memory of an esteemed uncle *whom he had murdered*. He touched also on the "shame-faced giving,"—because our neighbours give; the customary giving,—as one drops a piece of money into a church-plate; and so forth. Nor did Mr. Saville Heaton become particularly impressive till rather more than half way on in his discourse; when he dwelt on the secret motives, and even wicked motives, which may produce apparently good actions; and in that part of his sermon his nervous hesitation seemed to leave him, and he spoke with more boldness and more eloquence of language than usual; the faces of his listeners being still noted in a sort of careless way by Maggie—while she occasionally broke the tedium of the time by irreverently and surreptitiously cracking green hazel nuts with her fine white teeth, and eating them.

And those faces would have made a good study for a painter. The warm approval,

the sympathy with all that was true and earnest, in the countenance of Old Sir Douglas; the serene, attentive, angelic brow and eyes of his young wife; Lorimer, with folded arms and set compressed mouth, looking apparently only at the uninteresting straw hassock at his feet; Alice, demure, and yet restless, furtively blinking from time to time side glances at the preacher; and Mr. James Frere (for he also attended, though his patroness at the Castle had tossed her head in scorn at the proposal) with his dark bright eyes fixed on Saville Heaton, rather with an expression of curiosity to learn how this man would handle the matter, than with any reference to the matter itself; but all attention to his words.

Then it was—as the speaker dwelt on the power of God, "to whom all hearts be open, all desires known," to sift and discern the variety of motives that may produce one common result; when he warned his hearers in the language of Scripture that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known;" that "whatsoever has been spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light,—and that which was whispered in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops,"—with all argument pertaining to those solemn texts and withering denunciations of the pharisaical hypocrisy which deludes man, but never can delude God:—then it was, as I have said, that this shy and common-place minister became extremely impressive; and spoke indeed so forcibly and so well, that an electric thrill seemed to go through his small congregation, both among the learned and the unlearned.

Alice Ross sat stiller than ever; but her glance wandered from Heaton to Sir Douglas, and back again with sidelong skill to others of the group: while Mr. Frere's eyes were withdrawn from the preacher, though the expression of attention and curiosity even deepened in his face. He seemed to be resolving some problem in his mind. Suddenly his fine eyes flashed upwards again, and turned—not on Heaton, but on Lorimer Boyd!

Their eyes met. Lorimer seemed to have been observing him. Some ripple of movement, which did not even amount to one of Mr. Boyd's "grim smiles," flickered round his mouth: and some of that inexplicable shrinking, which is visible in the human eye even when its gaze is not withdrawn—in moments of fear, suspicion, or conscious duplicity—contracted for a second or two the bright, bold, clever orbs

which had "charmed" Miss Alice Ross. Then another expression passed into them. Not of fear; of defiance; of hard resolution; an accordance for the moment of the eyes with the hard, resolute, animal mouth: and then Mr. James Frere's countenance became, as before, simply attentive, and watchful of the preacher's closing words.

But there had been, in that short moment, between those two men, that strange spiritual communication which all of us who have any experience of life, know so well. Mr. Frere became aware that Mr. Boyd distrusted him; and Mr. Boyd, that he and his distrust were alike defied and set at naught by the eloquent stranger.

Nor did it need the sealing of the conviction in Mr. Frere's mind that Lorimer had "something to do with the sermon," which was naturally produced by over-hearing Mr. Saville Heaton on their walk homewards answer Sir Douglas's kindly congratulations on the excellence of that discourse, by the modest deprecatory reply, "Well, I had the advantage of talking the subject over with Mr. Boyd: indeed, of reading the sermon to him, and receiving some valuable suggestions. He is a very superior man: a great scholar: a most cultivated mind: I feel greatly indebted to him for the interest he has shown in my plans and my school; and I consider my composition, such as it was, much benefited by his remarks."

When Mr. James Frere heard this modest reply to Sir Douglas's compliments, he was walking immediately behind the group; side by side with Miss Alice Ross. Involuntarily he turned to her, to see how she "took" the answer so made, and perhaps to make some disparaging comment on Mr. Boyd's interference, by way of guarding his own interests in that quarter. He met Alice's glance as he had previously met Lorimer's; and received much the same degree of enlightenment from it, though of a more satisfactory kind.

He decided that it was quite unnecessary to make any observation. He therefore merely sighed, and, casting his eyes wistfully over the hills and intervening scenery, he said, "I would I were away from this place! I must think of leaving Clochnabhen."

And Alice Ross did not say in any foolish tender way, "Pray don't leave us," or "Oh, I should be so sorry;" but, with a little hard short laugh, and slow drawing utterance, she said "You are easily beaten, Mr. Frere."

And Mr. Frere, though he had some ex-

perience of the sex, was just sufficiently startled to pause before he said:

"No: I am *not* easily beaten, Alice Ross."

Whether she noticed his calling her by her name, and approved or disapproved the liberty so taken, could not be guessed from outward evidence. She certainly approved the sentiment, if the smile of odd sinister triumph that slowly left her small thin mouth spoke true: and she made no attempt to withdraw from his companionship, and join some one else in the walking party.

Nay, when Mr. Frere turned back after escorting her, and shook hands with Sir Douglas, and lamented that he could not stay to dinner, but must return to the Dowager Clochnabhen, he saw, with great satisfaction, that pussy-cat Alice had glided out of the party at the castle door, and was standing alone and *en cachette* against a mass of thick laurels, watching him as he walked away.

If Mr. Frere had been a commonplace gentleman he might have stopped, and waved his hand perhaps, in token of farewell, and of his consciousness that she was thus occupied. But he knew better. Not Isaac, when he went forth to meditate in the fields at eventide, could seem more utterly unconscious of observation. Only, when he reached the vantage ground of a slight ascent which prefaced the more rugged climb to come he paused at that knoll, and lifting his hat, not in token of salutation, but as relieving himself of a formal encumbrance, stood and gazed at the red sky of evening and the picturesque scenery, believing (not in vain) that those shrewd grey eyes were still fixed upon him, and that he himself appeared to the full as picturesque as any other object within their view.

CHAPTER XXIX.

KENNETH AGAIN!

BUT Mr. Saville Heaton was not destined to enlighten his congregation with another sermon distilled through the alembic of Lorimer Boyd's mind. At Torrieburn, and at Glenrossie also, that Sunday evening, all was perplexity and alarm. News, — bad news, — had come of Kenneth! Not this time of his conduct, or his debts, or anything which friends might remedy. No; but Kenneth lay ill of fever, dying, some of the doctors thought, at San Sebastian,

which port he had reached, intending to return from Spain through France.

A brief and rather incoherent letter dictated to some woman, partly by Giuseppe, narrated the circumstances; how, having had a burning fever, he had apparently recovered, but now it was a low nervous fever, and the young Signore could not lift his hands to his head for weakness.

"And, indeed, it is now more than eight days that his young Excellency has not sworn, nor shown any symptoms of his usual animation, and my mind is at sea, and *mi crepa il cuore*; it breaks my heart; for, could I hear the well-beloved Excellency call me a dog,—or find some fault,—I would revive; and, indeed, only yesterday, it was in my hope that he was about to throw at me the cup of lemonade (which he relished not, finding it bitter), for his eyes showed much anger; but with grief, I say, it passed, and he only set the cup on one side. And that same evening, my limbs all trembled, for he called and said—'Giuseppe! death is coming; tell my uncle to forgive everything, as I do.' And with a great sigh his young Excellency sank in a great swoon. Now, if some friend will come to his Excellency, it will be good. Not for weariness, for I am strong, and will nurse the Signore as a child; but for cheering by words in the English tongue, and to understand well whether he should live or die; and if he die, to say what shall be done.

"And with much misery I recommend myself to all saints of mercy—as also I commend to God and His goodness your most noble Excellency, and the young Excellency who is dying, and all the good family,

"I am,

"Your most devoted and most humble,
"GIUSEPPE."

In a hand nearly illegible, but evidently scrawled by Kenneth, was added, "Tell my mother I think of her and Torrieburn."

Little had he written, poor Kenneth, to that mother, or his uncle, or any one else during his wanderings. "Au jour, le jour" was his motto, and the careless enjoyment of passing hours his sole object in life. Now life was trembling in the balance, and this moan from a foreign land came, like a sick child's cry at midnight, to startle them all.

Who should go to Kenneth?

Sir Douglas could not. Dearly as he loved this Absalom, he had holier and closer ties that held him back. His young wife was ailing, was soon to be a mother;

his place was with her, not with Kenneth. Lorimer would have been willing enough, but would he, could he, be welcome to the young, unjust, irritable mind? It was settled that Saville Heaton should go. He had been Kenneth's tutor; he was his father; and though the rebellion and ingratitude of boyhood and adolescence had been his sole return for much kindness, the bitter speech had once been flung at him in one of Kenneth's rages,—"I care of me! Who thanks you? You were paid for your care of me, such as it was!—still, the gentle nature of the man, and his desire to do his best for Maggie's sake, upborne him through much insult and ill, and they had not been on bad terms during the latter years of Kenneth's life, nor had Kenneth been much at home, due to provoke, or be provoked by, unkind communion.

Saville Heaton was to go, then: alone. As to being accompanied by his wife, it was not to be thought of for a moment. Maggie raving and sobbing in a sick bed, where, of all things, quiet was as desirable; Maggie struggling to express herself in broad Scotch among foreigners to whom even English was barely comprehensible; Maggie travelling and living in foreign hotels, who had never stirred from Torrieburn;—it was simply an impossibility.

Luckily it never appeared to that female in any other light. She shrank and sobbed over Kenneth's state incessantly during the two or three hours of prostration that intervened between the receipt of the ill tidings and her husband's departure; but she never thought of pleading with him. She rocked herself to sleep in spasmodic sobbings, and left the packing and arranging of his scanty comforts to yet more ignorant servant lassie. She repeatedly told him he would be killed, eaten "among their outlandish men"; then, starting to her feet, urged him to go, and reproached him for doing so. "While, maybe, Kenneth lay deceeing." At length he attempted to bid her farewell, and start, she clung to him as if she never intended him to leave her; and the dog-cart rapidly drove away, above the sound of its wheels came the sharp, plaintive cries of her distress. Nor did he alter, until provoked by the efforts of a poor awkward servant to console and cheer her, and persuade her to "leave me and step ben, like a dear leddie." He turned suddenly, and administered to the would-be sympathiser a most acc-

vigorous box on the ear. The girl retreated "ben" into the house, and Maggie's renewed howling was only put a stop to, as usual, by sheer bodily exhaustion.

By the time her father, the miller—to whom her mother had gone to communicate the "awfu' tidins"—arrived at Torrieburn House, Maggie was quiet enough; and the three sat down in the parlour to a bowl of extremely stiff whisky toddy. The "auld wife" retained sufficient discretion to drag her daughter upstairs after a while, and put her to bed before she retired to her own; but the miller was still asleep on the horse-hair sofa, with all his clothes on, when the morning shone with fullest light in at the windows of the room where Saville Heaton's books and better occupations lay scattered about, testifying alike to the contrast of his tastes with those who had surrounded him, and to the haste with which he had departed.

No place,—no corner of the wildest desert or the deepest wood—is so silent as the room in which we have been accustomed daily to hear a familiar voice. When Maggie came down in the mid-day, there was more weeping. And, when later in the afternoon, Sir Douglas, in his pity, rode over to see her, and actually proposed that she should come up and dine at Glenrossie, she shook her head, saying, she would rather "stay among her mon's bukes and think o' Kenneth;" a piece of vague sentiment which found favour with the tender-hearted soldier; though, indeed, there mingled with Maggie's real sorrow a covert repugnance to be sorrowful in presence of Gertrude, whom she persisted in looking upon as a "fause-hearted jilt," and a "proud jade," and connecting her with Kenneth's long absence and heavy discontents, as shown in his own angry letters and confessions.

Sir Douglas, too, had his extra sadness out of the bad news. He thought over the sentence, "Tell my uncle to forgive everything—as I do!" Did the lad still think himself wronged? and how? What had been his grounds for resentment and complaint? Unjust; of course unjust, for Sir Douglas's conscience was clear of all offence, but still existent. What had he to "forgive," even in the waywardness of his own warped imagination?

Sir Douglas's heart ached as he sat through the silent dinner, where all were thinking in their various ways of Kenneth; and ached next day when he sat in his wife's beautiful morning room, gazing abstractedly over his book at the light on her

shining hair, and the gay patterned tapestry border she was working.

As he looked, he sighed; and at the sound of that sigh she looked up, and then she softly rose, and coming towards him, tenderly kissed his saddened brow.

"Oh, my love; my dearest love; I wish," said Sir Douglas heartily, "that I knew about Kenneth!"

"We shall have news of him soon," Gertrude answered, in her low quiet voice.

Some inexplicable link in that chain of memory, "wherewith we are darkly bound," brought vividly back to old Sir Douglas a scene of the past. He saw his Gertrude, his young wife, in her actual form; but he saw also, beyond, and as it were through, that bright visible presence,—his Gertrude yet younger; the fair girl of the Villa Mandorlo, the night he had yearned to ask her about Kenneth, and had refrained.

Then, also, she had kissed him. It was her first caress; the caress not of passion, but of a tender and instinctive wish to comfort.

So, now.

And then and now the sense of anxiety—of love unutterable—and of being baffled in his wish for some clear certainty about his graceless nephew, blended into pain and oppressed him.

But, she was there, that lovely wife who loved him! He ought to be happy and contented, if ever man was. He could not vex her.

So, day by day, they waited news of Kenneth, in silence and hope.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAVILLE HEATON CONQUERED.

News came. First bad and depressing, then better; Kenneth more cheerful, greatly pleased at Saville Heaton coming out to him; Giuseppe invaluable, as gentle as a nurse, and as active and robust as he was gentle. Then a fluctuation of worse again. Kenneth had a relapse, and was in an alarming state of depression and weakness; messages were received from him, of penitence and remorse for wasted years and misapplied energies; which tender Sir Douglas wept over, exulted over, repeated with a quivering smile to his wife; and then went back to old memories, old plans, old hopes, that had begun when he thought he would get Kenneth the brother sent to Eton, and "made a man of;" and flowered

once more (after the disappointment of that life) when little Kenneth the orphan was trusted to his benevolence.

Kenneth was to get well, to reform, to marry, to be once more beloved, and cordially welcomed. All was to come right.

And, as far as Kenneth's recovery was concerned, all *did* come right. Saville Heaton's simple straightforward letters gave a most graphic account of the increasing strength and irritability of the patient; and he dwelt with much sympathy on the *native* gladness with which Giuseppe accepted all instances of ill-temper and impatience as so many proofs of convalescence. He especially narrated how once, when Kenneth had passionately stamped and sworn at the young Italian for some slight delay in bringing a bath, Giuseppe was afterwards met by him in the street, with his eyes lifted in beaming prayer to a painted wooden Madonna in a blue gown covered with golden stars, fixed over the door of a corner house, and, being greeted by Mr. Heaton as he passed, joyously informed him he had been "rendering thanks to Mary and the Santo Bambino; for certainly now the young Excellency was becoming quite himself again." And quite himself again Kenneth accordingly became.

After that desirable consummation, for a while the accounts became scanty and confused; and all that could be gathered was, that Saville Heaton was very unwell, then worse, then prostrated with low typhoid fever, then too weak to send personal accounts, and then, — after a pause, — a letter came from the English Vice-consul, stating that the Rev. Saville Heaton was DEAD; that he had been buried with great respect and attention, had been followed to the grave by three or four English residents at San Sebastian, and by the Vice-consul himself; who had been much impressed by his kindly and devoted care of the first invalid, Mr. Kenneth Ross (whom he had since understood to be his step-son), and much pleased with his gentlemanly and diffident manners. That news had been sent to Granada, — whither young Mr. Kenneth Ross had betaken himself as soon as he was able to move, — of the extreme danger of his step-father, in order that that young gentleman might consider whether it would not be advisable for him to return; but that he had merely sent a letter (after rather an anxious period of suspense on the part of those who had addressed him) expressing his regret at the news, and desiring that "if anything happened to Mr. Saville

Heaton," the Vice-consul would have the goodness to see that his papers, and all things belonging to him, were properly taken care of, and transmitted to the care of Sir Douglas Ross, in Scotland. The Vice-consul was happy to assure Sir Douglas that such also had been the sole instructions given him by the dying man; who had indeed expressed himself in a way that must give Sir Douglas much pleasure; saying that he was "the best friend he ever had, and the best man he ever knew." That he had shown anxiety that some little valuables (ornaments of some sort) should be safely transmitted to his widow, with the message that during the very few opportunities he had had of being out in the open air during Kenneth's illness, he had endeavoured to find something that would please her, to wear for his sake. That he had sunk with such extreme rapidity at last (not being of a robust constitution), that he had been unable to write particulars, as he desired, to his wife and Sir Douglas; but that he had died most peacefully. There had been delirium, or worse; and there had been some confusion in a recommendation he apparently desired to make to Sir Douglas, that he "would endeavour that Kenneth should do his duty *by his mother*" (at least so the Vice-consul understood him); but at the last he was extremely clear and collected, and his final words, in answer to an expression of compassion which escaped that gentleman as to his being *alone* in such an hour, were "Not so alone as I appear. It is a great thing to die with perfect trust in God's mercy, and perfect trust in some surviving friend." After which brief utterance he sighed once or twice, shivered, sighed again, and lay still.

Something "had happened" to Mr. Saville Heaton, according to the possibility indicated in the letter from Granada — Death had happened.

When the news came to Torrieburn the results were pretty much what might have been expected. Great regret and respect were expressed by some members of his scanty flock; great weeping and wailing on the part of Maggie; great pity from Sir Douglas and his wife.

Lorimer was at Clochnaben when the accounts were sent over to him. He read them slowly, set his teeth hard, clenched his hand, and looked gloomily at his mother, who had been talking meanwhile in an under-tone to Alice, respecting the news. Mr. James Frere was present, and very silent.

"Well, Lorimer, you need scarce look at me as though I had cut the man's head off," said the feminine dowager, as she caught her son's glance.

"I was not thinking of you."

"Of him, then. If you'd given an ounce of sense in those brains of which you are so proud, you'd think it the very best thing that could happen. When a man's in everybody's way the sooner he's lifted out of the way the better. That's my dictum."

"Neither (though I do not agree with your dictum) was I thinking of Saville Heaton's hard fate."

"He was taken in God's good time," interposed Mr. Frere.

"Perhaps you'd condescend to say what you were thinking of, that makes you look as if you wished we were all supping on poisoned brose," snarled Lady Clochnaben, without noticing the interruption.

"I was wishing," said Lorimer, with bitter vehemence, "that, whenever 'God's good time' shall come for taking Kenneth Ross, he may die as forlorn a death as the man who nursed him to recovery, and whom he deserted when it was his turn to render service. And I wish it with all my heart and soul!"

"Devil doubt you!" retorted the Dowager; "but I shouldn't think your banning or blessing would make much odds in what's settled above for that young reprobate: and, though with him (as usual) bad's the best, he had his excuse this time, I suppose, in being too weak for journeying."

"A man is never too weak to do his duty; that's my dictum," said Lorimer, with a provoking echo of his mother's manner. "He can but sacrifice his life in doing it; if that particular occasion be, as Mr. Frere terms it, 'God's good time to take him.' Mr. Saville Heaton risked his life, and lost it, in doing what he conceived to be his duty by his step-son; and we should all be thankful, meanwhile, that the worthy object of his solicitude is convalescent, and enjoying life at Granada."

"Oh! Mr. Boyd, you do hate Kenneth Ross so!" said Alice, with a deprecating drawl.

"Ay!" chimed in Lady Clochnaben. "And hate him not altogether for his faults either; though his death would do you little good now, Lorimer."

She gave a clutch to settle the black silk condemnatory bonnet a little lower on her forehead, and laughed a short, hard, cackling laugh as she spoke. But the pale anger of her son's face seemed rather to

check even her masculine courage, and she hastily added:

"But you were always besotted with any of the people Sir Douglas chose to take up. I wonder you don't offer yourself as third husband to that ranting red-haired woman at Torrieburn; that faced me out about my factor and the cart-wheel, on your direct encouragement."

Lorimer made no answer. He was deliberately folding up the papers he had been reading; and, having done so, he rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To Glenrossie, to see how Douglas bears this."

"Are you coming back to-night?"

"No."

"Shall you be back to-morrow?"

"I don't know."

"Humph! I'm sure, whatever your return to Italy may be to Sir Douglas and Lady Ross, we'll have little miss of your company here."

"You will the better bear my departure on Wednesday."

"The day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"I presume you have communicated the fact to the friends you prefer; you certainly never warned me that you were going so soon."

"Warned you, mother? My stay is no pleasure to you—my absence no pain! Would to God!"

But Lorimer did not speak out the rest, or that hard mother might have heard that son of gloom declare his wish that he were lying buried in a foreign grave in San Sebastian instead of Saville Heaton; followed to the tomb by strangers and an English Vice-consul, instead of wept for by natural friends.

"Parva Domus; Magna Quies," muttered he to himself. And then he held out his hand in token of farewell to the angry dowager.

She choked a little, in spite of her assumption of utter indifference.

"I suppose this is not good-bye for good and all, in spite of sulks, eh, Lorimer?"

"No, mother; I will see you again before I go."

It was spoken very sadly. He bowed to Alice and to Frere, and was gone.

"Give way once, and be ruled for ever; that's my dictum," said Lady Clochnaben, after a brief pause. "But Lorimer was always a heavy handful; even as a child he was neither to drive nor to lead. But he's a clever brain—a clever brain." And she

glanced with a mixture of pride and discontent to the scarlet-bound books on a further table, Lorimer's college efforts.

Mr. James Frere rose and brought one of the volumes. "I will read one or two aloud, if you please," said he.

A grunt of assent gave the implied permission; and after that exercise, Mr. Frere's own talents were the theme of discussion. Saville Heaton's place was empty. His voice was dumb.

It made Alice Ross almost playful. There was a pretty glitter in her cat-like eyes, and a sort of purring murmur of underlying content in her slow soft voice, whenever she answered or volunteered an observation.

While over the hills, in the calm Western light, went Lorimer Boyd, to that other castle, where the *magna quies* co-existed yet with life and hope.

Sir Douglas had not returned from a pilgrimage on foot to Torrieburn; but Gertrude, who had driven over, was resting on the sofa, looking very pale and wearied. She welcomed Lorimer eagerly, and, after the first greeting, burst into tears.

"It is very foolish," she said, smiling through that transient shower, "for Mr. Heaton was almost a stranger to me, and he was a good man; a pious man; but there is something forlorn in his going away to die so, in a foreign land; and I am not very strong just now, and poor Mrs. Ross Heaton is so vehement in the expression of her feelings that it shakes one's nerves!"

Lorimer stopped her, with more emotion than was usual in his manner.

"Oh! for God's sake, don't excuse yourself to me for being tender and womanly," he said. "Better to me is any expression of feeling; better the animal howling of that poor untutored creature at Torrieburn — than the iron hardness one sees in some hearts! She may well lament Heaton, for a more indulgent gentleman never tied himself for beauty's sake to an uncongenial mate. And he had dignity too. No one ever could have seen — who did not watch him closely and understand him thoroughly — how often he felt wounded and ashamed of the choice he had made (if indeed we can term it choice; for I believe the determination to marry was rather on Maggie's side). I have heard her herself say he had never given her a hard word; if I had been her husband I am afraid she would have heard a good many."

And, with the last words, the saturnine smile returned to Lorimer's lips, and the conversation took a more cheerful turn between him and Gertrude Ross.

Dear companions they were; dear friends, through shade and sunshine. Gertrude had said no more than she felt, when on a former occasion she wished he had been born Sir Douglas's brother. And Sir Douglas loved him too; with that strict divine attachment which in its perfection we are assured "passeth the love of woman," and which an old poet has immortalized by comparison with a yet diviner communion:

"Since David had his Jonathan, CHRIST his John."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE DAYS THAT GROW INTO YEARS."

THE pages which divide the events of life turn very slowly; but the pages which narrate the history of a life turn rapidly. Events which change whole destinies compress themselves into a single sentence; joy goes by like a flash of light, and the tears which have wasted the very eyes that wept them demand no fuller record than the brief monotonous lament of poor Marguerite in "Faust":

"Ich weisse, und weisse, und weisse!"

Gertrude's life was gliding by in sunlight and joy. Bonfires had been lit on the pleasant hills for the birth of an heir to Gerrossie; and the little heir himself was already beginning to prattle the thoughts of childhood; and puzzle his elders, as all children do, with questions which theologians, moralists, and philosophers would attempt to answer in vain.

"Old Sir Douglas" was very little older; but at that age silver begins to mingle with the brightest and curliest hair, and the temples of that broad frank forehead were getting higher and barer, and smooth under the touch of the strong little rosy fingers of his idolized boy.

Mr. James Frere had found a clear field after the death of Mr. Saville Heaton; and had so far modified his views of open-air worship, that he had eagerly seized the opportunity of "mentioning" to Sir Douglas (backed by much more skilful "mentioning" on the part of Alice Ross), that he would not object to succeed that simple and unobtrusive preacher; and endeavour, by the grace of God, to lead the little flock (so ill taught hitherto) into the right way. The school, founded by his earnest predecessor, were also placed under his superintendence; and

rigidly were the children trained and looked after. The penitential Sabbath, instead of the holiday Sabbath, was established amongst them; the "Lord's-day" was erased from the book of common life, and left blank from all human interest. To swear, to lie, to thieve, to strike even to bloodshed, were gradually shown to be less offensive to the Creator, than to hum a song, whistle a tune, write a letter, or take a sauntering happy walk over the hill, and sit chatting under the birken trees in the heather, overlooking the silver lake. A boy of ten was excommunicated, as it were, and expelled the "schule," for being found with his mouth and pockets full of blackberries so freshly gathered that they could only have been procured on the "Lord's-day," by the terrible desecration of gathering them on his way to service. In vain did his old grandmother plead in guttural and nasal accents that the creature "was but a wean," a "puir wee laddie that wad be mair circumspeck" for the time to come. The time to come was blackened for him with public reprobation; and, as his compeers passed him, sitting alone in the ingle nook, or on the stones in the sunshine, they nudged each other on the shoulder and whispered, "Yon's Jamie Macmichael, that the meenister 'ull no permit to enter, ye ken; he broke the Lord's-day!"

Bolder and bolder grew Mr. James Frere under the consciousness of his own increasing influence; and little by little his flowery and eloquent discourses crept even to the forbidden margin of the habits of Glenrossie Castle; to the occasional omission of attendance, and the "forsaking of assembling ourselves together;" to the neglect of bringing the young scion of the house of Douglas to the house of God, "even as young Samuel was brought by his grateful mother, in the very dawn of his consecrated days: indeed, at an age so tender, that his mother made a little coat for him and brought it for him to wear each successive year." An image, which, so far from wanting impressiveness in the ears of the listening population, caused the auld wives to look up with trembling reverence and conviction at the face of the preacher.

Neither did Mr. Frere spare even the "Lady of the Castle" in his fervent denunciations. The singing on Sabbath evenings, even though — (as it were to compound with the devil) — the songs sung were harmless, pathetic, or religious; the glad walks and laughing conversations, heard by God, as Adam and Eve were overheard when His voice wandered through the still-

ness of Paradise in the fall of the day; the robes and sumptuous apparel of the graceful earthly form; the long residence in foreign lands, and the bringing forth out of those lands the minstrelsy of a foreign tongue, "yea, even such songs as Rizzio sang to Mary, and Mary with Rizzio, when her soul went forth to commune with temptation, and with the powers of darkness, and with sensual passion, and the confusion of all things right with all things wrong;" all this the new minister preached upon; more especially on those Sundays when Lady Glenrossie failed to show herself in the high old-fashioned pew, to which Mr. Frere on such occasions lifted his fine eyes, commenting on "the darkness of its emptiness," and not unfrequently sliding in some wonderful way into a comparison of himself with John Knox, — who boldly spoke forth the commission given unto him by God, fearing not the authority of kings, under the King of kings; nor the power of the beauty of woman; nor her silver tongue; nor the ruddy colour of her cheek; nor the tangles of her shining hair; while yet these things were belonging to one unregenerate and unredeemed: but with an iron tongue, — like a bell that will call to church whether men come or no, or like a clock that will certainly strike the hours and tell that they are passing or past, whether men listen or no, — so did the iron tongue of John Knox sound in the ears of that unregenerate queen and her sinful companions, and so would he (James Frere), while yet his tongue remained unpalsied by disease, and unquieted by the silence of death, continue to speak, yea, to cry and to shout, in the name of the Lord, if so be that by such speaking he could stir the heart of but one thoughtless sinner, and bid such a one turn to God while yet there was time; before the birthright of Heaven was sold for the mess of pottage served in an earthly porringer; before the vain weeping should come, in a bitter shower like the waters of Marah, when the soul should find no place for repentance though seeking it carefully with tears.

And now and then, — though sparingly and cautiously, — Mr. James Frere would allude to his own self-sacrifices in the service of God; and leave the impression on his hearers (however that impression might be conveyed) that he might be called away to a more extended sphere of usefulness at any moment; and would then conceive it his duty to go, — even if it were to the blackness of savage lands, where the tiger prowled and the lion roared and the hyena glared through the desolate night, preying like Sa-

tan on the unwary ; or into the mirth of dissolute cities, where festering sin and disease threatened the very life of the preacher. But, in the meanwhile, his whole soul was as it were wrapped and encompassed by the flame of desire to be of use in that special district committed to him by an over-ruling Providence. That he felt no scorn for the smallness of his task ; for the Master who meted out his talents gave so many as he pleased, and no more, to each servant to employ ; and, few or many, it was that servant's duty to double them. And often, he assured his listeners, he spent the day in prayer and fasting, in lifting up his eyes unto the hills, thinking of the coming of the Lord, and neither allowing bread nor meat to enter his lips till he had searched his heart to the uttermost, and cast out of it the evil things : as he humbly, earnestly — yea, with a cry of anguish as it were, implored his attentive hearers to do ; so that they might stand pure, — as pure, at least, as sinful flesh and blood might hope to do.

And Mr. Frere's exhortations, and his mysterious allusion to the evil thing, and to his state of semi-starvation, — supported as that last allusion was by the spare figure, the meagre cheek with its hectic flush, and the bright abstracted look he wore when in the pulpit, — had a wonderful effect on the congregation : his hearers increasing and multiplying daily. And though there was little opportunity of practising abstinence among a population whose chief sustenance was the harmless earthly pottage of oatmeal "parritch," still a certain notion of the merit of all asceticism gained ground more and more amongst them, and above all a habit of watching whether their neighbours were casting out the evil thing with proper diligence and energy ; and the condemnation by each man of his neighbour grew and prospered. Their Sabbaths were passed in the most rigorous strictness and the utmost unfriendliness. The disposition to meditation and prayer in the long do-nothingness of the tedious hours was principally shown in meditating on various faults, and in thanking God that they were not "as other men."

Gertrude went about doing good as usual ; soothing the sick, comforting the afflicted, relieving the poor. But her benefits were somehow received differently from the former days. A strong though vague impression that she and Queen Mary and Mr. Frere and John Knox were not dissimilar, haunted the minds through whose very narrow chinks the light of his preaching had come. Many felt almost a remorse at having

to be thankful at all to one so unregenerate and unredeemed : whose future fate was probably to seek repentance carefully with tears when it was too late to find it ; and who meanwhile was certainly going home to sing outlandish songs "such as Rizzio had sung to Mary and Mary to Rizzio" in the days of sinful feasting which preceded his assassination and the confusion of the whole Scottish kingdom.

So wore the time away — Gertrude unconscious of her waning popularity ; happy in a husband's love, and glorying in her child ; loving with a tender love the mother whose brightest quality was the love she also felt for that dear daughter ; and still trying to "pet" Alice — icy, alien, furtive-glancing Alice ; and innocently dreaming she had succeeded ! — glad, not jealous, at seeing Alice made more of than ever by Sir Douglas, whose love and happiness (good measure heaped up and running over) flowed to all within his reach — glad, not jealous at the regard shown to Sir Douglas's half-sister by the poor and the small tenantry : who deemed Alice Ross indeed far more "douce and discreet" than the Queen Mary of Glenrosie Castle, and treasured many a word and action intended by shrewd Alice to produce precisely that impression ; unwitting that those grains were dropped on purpose for their gleanings, — to sow in narrow fields of thought, and bear seed in their turn !

And it was in the midst of the swiftly passing though uneventful current of life thus described, that Sir Douglas entered Gertrude's bright morning room one summer's day, shortly after they had returned from a brief sojourn in London, with a bundle of papers and letters half opened in his hand, his countenance so flushed and irradiated with emotion and gladness that Gertrude wondered what could have happened, and thought that, much as she admired him, she never yet had comprehended how nobly beautiful was the dear familiar face.

"Gertrude — my sweet love, — Gertrude," he said, "I have a letter from Kenneth ; — really an admirable letter ; full of feeling and steady purpose and good plans. — and regret for the past. He begs me to try and arrange for the last time (you know he has still been rather imprudent of late) ; and says he is about to be married, to one every way satisfactory ; indeed, I know the name of the family he mentions. A Spanish girl, of high birth, wonderful beauty, and good fortune, whose acquaintance he made at Granada, just after that terrible illness ; her family were extremely kind to him ; and

indeed knew all about his people, as I know hers. It is a most glad and blessed piece of intelligence! He is to return here, as soon as he is united to his bride; and he hopes you will like her, and congratulate him. Your dear mother will be here soon: and we shall be a most joyful family party. Poor Kenneth! Well, at last all will be safe for him. He will steady and settle at last. Kenneth going to be married; it seems like a dream, does it not?"

"A very happy dream," Gertrude murmured, as she smiled up in her husband's face with those serene eyes, whose gaze was like what we imagine the seraphs might be. "A very happy dream!" and she gave a sigh of relief, thinking how often she had rather dreaded Kenneth's re-appearance after all the stormy scenes of Naples and the threats at the Villa Mandorlo.

But Sir Douglas knew none of those things.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FAMILY GATHERING.

WHETHER it was that Kenneth desired the first impression on his bride's mind of all things in Scotland to be favourable — conscious that, with his usual spirit of boastfulness, he had exaggerated all that was good, and suppressed all that was bad in the mention of his home — it is certain that he very eagerly accepted the cordial invitation of Sir Douglas to come to Glenrossie "till Torrieburn was more ready."

He arrived very late, in what splendour four horses from the last inn on the road could supply, and put off seeing his mother till next day; when he was to carry a commission from Sir Douglas, to ask her to come over and be introduced to his Spanish wife at the castle (as he was sure the latter would be "too fatigued to go to Torrieburn"), and to dine and sleep there.

Donna Eusebia Ross received the embrace of her new uncle and aunt, muffled and mantled as she was, with eager demonstrations of joy, and what the French call "effusion." Lady Charlotte had arrived only a few minutes before, and Gertrude was anxious to chat with her mother, and see to her comfort; so that, till the toilettes were over, and dinner served, the ladies saw nothing more of each other.

When Donna Eusebia did at last appear, they saw a most undeniable beauty; though she looked (as, indeed, she was) some years older than Kenneth. What with the splen-

dour of a rich complexion, made richer by the addition of rouge; the glossiness of hair made glossier with strongly scented oils; the deep crimson of the carnations twisted with black lace, on her head; the gems that glittered on her neck; the sudden turn and flashing of her glorious black eyes, and the equally sudden flirting and shutting of a painted fan mounted in mother of pearl and gold, the motion of which was so incessant that it seemed an integral portion of her living self; what with her gleaming smile when the curled lips parted and left her white teeth like waves in the sunshine disclosing a shell; what with the pretty trick she had, at the end of every laugh (and she laughed often), of giving a mischievous bite to the full under-lip, as though to punish it back to gravity; and what with the fling and leap of the soft fringes on her robe when she turned with quick animation to answer you, — there was so much lustre and movement about her, that it seemed as if she were a fire-fly, transformed by magic into a woman. And, if she stood still (as she very seldom did), the curve of her neck and back resembled some beautiful scroll-work in sculpture; while her tiny forward foot shone in its satin shoe, a separate miracle, — for you wondered how anything so small could have so much strength and majesty in it.

The old family butler looked at her, and at the little odd gummed curls on her brilliant cheek, while he helped her to wine, with profound disapprobation; but his subordinates were so struck with admiration they could scarcely attend to their duties, and only wished Old Sir Douglas had carried off such a matchless lady, when he resolved on bringing a wife from a foreign land.

After dinner she sang — melancholy soft "modinhas;" animated martial airs; and odd saltatory music, that seemed as abrupt in its sudden intervals of sweetness as she in her own proper movements. Trills and cadences, exclamations and pathetic sighs, and now and then, a beat of the tiny vehement foot in accompaniment, filled up the measure of her performance.

If the music of the lute, "when Rizzio sang to Mary and Mary to Rizzio," was of a sort held to be dangerous to their mutual morality, what ought to be the result of Donna Eusebia's melodious exercises?

"Oh! I really do think," said Lady Charlotte to Sir Douglas, as she sat perplexed and wondering on the sofa, anxiously pulling the memorable ringlet to its full length and then letting it go again, — "I really do feel as if she were somebody in a story: some-

body, you know, who flies about at night, — like the ballet, — I mean like the Sylphide in the ballet. Only, of course, she isn't as good as the Sylphide; at least the Sylphide I saw Taglioni do, long ago, one could not help being sorry for, and, except that she flew about, she seemed so quiet you know; but of course it would have been better if the lover in the ballet had loved the Highland girl in the green plaid. Still she was so wonderful, that one can't exactly wonder — but I dare say she'll keep Kenneth in good order — don't you think so?"

Sir Douglas smiled, rather abstractedly; he was musing over the prospect of life-long neighbourhood and companionship between this Spanish woman and his wife. He looked at his serene, dove-eyed Gertrude. The serene eyes were bent gently and with extreme approbation on the singer. As they left the piano, and Eusebia lingered to lift gloves and rings and a bracelet with pendent jewels which Kenneth reclasped on her arm, Lady Ross bowed her head while passing the ottoman where her husband was seated, and whispered, "What a bewitching creature!"

And Kenneth also evidently thought her a bewitching creature. He was what is called "passionately in love" with his Spanish Donna; and he occasionally adopted towards Gertrude, in memory of unforgotten days at the Villa Mandorlo, a manner absurdly compounded of triumph and resentment, especially when the applause of his bride's singing was greatest. It was a manner that seemed to say, "Ah, you wouldn't accept me, and now see what I've got. A woman with twice your beauty, and four times your voice, and twenty times your talent, and so in love with me that I believe she would stab any one she thought I fancied instead of her."

The next evening and the next passed off calmly enough. The sinner of Torrieburn came; and saw her son's foreign wife with interest and with admiration, though unable to make out the meaning of the gracious sentences in broken English, which were delivered with the gleaming smile and the "effusion" of manner Donna Eusebia thought right in addressing all relatives. One smothered fear of Kenneth's was not realized. Donna Eusebia did not perceive his mother's vulgarity. The few phrases in the broadest Scotch which Maggie in her amazement uttered from time to time, were Greek to her but not more obscure than a great deal of what other people said. The over-decoration of Maggie's still handsome person at this festal meeting was scarcely more than she herself had indulged in; and,

even if it had been, how was she to know that it was not as much the usual costume of an elderly Scotch lady, as the kilt which she had been shown in pictures and had already seen worn by peasantry the morning?

So they were all very comfortable. Sir Douglas very genial and cheerful; and a day was fixed for a dinner to neighbours and friends, some to stay in the Castle, and some only to come "over moor and fells" to feast, and drink healths, and congratulate on the marriage of Ross of Torrieburn and Douglas's nephew.

When the grim old dowager at Clochnaben Castle ascertained from Alice that the bel of the radiant locks was an English guest at the castle of Glenrosie; and, probably, if not certainly, grace with presence the table of its master, she flared, and defiantly shook her head with the silk bonnet on it, at the unconscious card invitation; and, pinching that obnoxious pasteboard hard, between a thumb and finger of each hand, as she held it out to Sir Douglas's half-sister, she ejaculated, "Well! that ever I should live to see this day, when such a neighbourhood as ours — when first your mother came here — neighbourhood of good names and families, and folk well-to-do and respectable — should come to be such a heather-run-gum as it is now! How Lady Ross dare to write such words to me — 'Rejoiced to meet friends and neighbours on a happy occasion of Mr. Kenneth's marriage.' Happy occasion, indeed! I wonder what fine Spanish she-grandee of a wife you think of the miller's daughter! Friends neighbours: was I ever friendly, or neighbourly either, with that ranting woman? I'll not stir from Clochnaben; shall Clochnaben stir; nor Mr. James Forster, whose name Lady Ross has had just the blind impudence to add in; expecting decent women, and clergy, and people of a Christian sort, to sit bugger-mugger at women who've done nothing but offend the Lord ever since they were baptized. Really a thing that should be noticed for reprobation, and young Lady Ross should blush to have written such a card."

So saying, the irate dowager flung the card into the wood fire crackling before the hearth, and, giving a last trembling shake of repudiation to the black bonnet, she added —

"Humph! It's not the only thing I ought to go to flames and brimstone. You may just tell your milk-and-water of Glenrosie that I'm a trifle less better than she is, and have neither an angelic

band nor a young lover to make me knuckle down to such company. And, when I'm asked to meet such, I answer stoutly, *No. Keep yourself to yourself on such occasions; that's my dictum.*"

But, when Ailie had described "all the doings" at the castle, all the singing, and strangeness, and entertainment to be gathered therefrom; when she had described that manner of Kenneth's which she had shrewdly watched from her half-closed eyes, aided by the light of foregone conclusions; when she dwelt on the offence a refusal would give Sir Douglas, with the love he had for his nephew; and probably also to the "Spanish she-grandee" he had married, Lady Clochnaben sniffed, wavered, and covered the retreat from her resolute stand, which — (curiosity getting the better of propriety) — she at length permitted herself to make, — by giving utterance to another dictum; namely, that one was no more bound to know beforehand what company one would meet at dinner than what dishes would be set on the table; that, maybe, Maggie would not be there (this being an interpretation to save her conscience, for she felt convinced of the contrary), but that, if the dreaded Jezebel *did* come, then she would show her neighbourly abhorrence of a neighbour's faults by treating Mrs. Ross Heaton with stern disdain; never speaking to her; never seeming to perceive her presence; and, if she *dared* volunteer an observation intended for the Clochnaben ear, then to pour out such open reproaches, such vials of fiery wrath, as would teach the brazen hussy never to forget herself again; even if she was puffed into as much importance as the toad in the fable by the unheard-of imprudence and apathy of Lady Ross; an apathy as to the great rules of marriage and chastity which could only be attributed to her foreign education, and the idiocy of the mother who superintended it.

And so a hughty condescension of assent was vouchsafed; and the Dowager Clochnaben, — clothed in black velvet trimmed with *grèbe* bordering, and with a necklet of large single diamonds surmounting a white gauze ruff, — sailed into the great crimson room where the company were assembling, and cast a severe and searching glance over the heads and shoulders of most of the party, to see if the sinner of Torrieburn was there.

Yes, she was! she was; in spite of all proper regulations of human conduct. And, even then, Dowager Clochnaben had a frown ready to annihilate her, only that Maggie never looked her way. She was seated in a

great crimson silk arm-chair, one of her large white arms lounging on either side of it; giving a peculiar look of squareness to a figure already portly. She had on a gown of pale green satin, excessively trimmed with white blonde, and rather too short for a lady whose habit it was to sit cross-legged, with one foot in the air. But, beyond that, the dowager could find no comfort, nor any special ridicule in Maggie's appearance. Mrs. Ross Heaton was fortunately very proud of her golden hair, and had not therefore hidden it with wreaths or lace-caps on this occasion; she had merely plaited its immense length, and coiled it round, as Lady Clochnaben said, "just like the sea-serpent she was."

She seemed extremely cheerful and elate; rather loud in her laugh, and an object of some attention to the gentlemen immediately near her.

The party was rather numerous. People Kenneth had not seen from childhood, were gathered there — names he faintly remembered sounded in his ear — hands utterly unfamiliar clutched his with sentences of congratulation.

There was Major Maxwell, who had served with Sir Douglas, and Mr. Innes of Innes, and three Forbeses of three several places, who had barely a distant consanguinity among them, though all bore the same name, and who were accordingly all called by the names of their places, and the good word Forbes never mentioned. There was a remarkably handsome young Highlander in a kilt, with a velvet jacket, who rejoiced in the title of Monzies of Craigievar and Poldoch, and who had an estate of about two hundred a year, somewhere "ayont the hills." There were Campbells, and Stuarts, and Frasers, and Gordons, all "good men and true;" and many who had served their country, though their country was utterly indifferent to their existence — loyal men who loved their unseen monarch, and were ready at all times to fight in India, China, or America, as the case might be.

The dinner was gay, and healths were drunk even in the presence of the ladies. The Spanish beauty flashed eyes and fan and jewels, with double and treble energy, and bit her under lip more than ever, and laughed with Monzies of Craigievar and Poldoch. Lady Clochnaben grew grimmer and colder; as the winter sky grows in the fall of the day. Mr. James Frere became excessively animated; insomuch that even the wary Alice was caught with an expression of surprise, and something strangely resembling fear, on her generally guarded countenance.

And Lady Ross, after also glancing at him once or twice unquietly, gave the usual signal for the ladies to proceed to the drawing-room.

There the Spanish beauty threw herself full length on one of the sofas with an exclamation of fatigue and exhaustion. Lady Ross moved towards her, and sat down by her side. Alice conversed in an undertone with Lady Charlotte.

Coffee was served and taken; and then there was a pause.

How could Maggie find courage to address that pillar of black velvet, which stood erect, surmounted by the diamond necklet, leaning one stern hand on the chimney-piece, and setting one stern foot on the fender!

She *did* find courage, careless courage; did not even know any was needed. Still seated and lounging, she looked up at the dowager and said,—

"I kenned ye weel by sicht, Leddy Clochnaben, but we're strangers else. Ye were no ow'r willing to show, the day ye mind I cam' wi' my puir mon, Mr. Heaton, to speak wi' ye."

Lady Clochnaben positively shuddered with anger; but she made no reply.

Maggie raised her voice, already something of the loudest, as if she thought the hearer might be deaf.

"I'm saying I'm glad we're met at last, Leddy Clochnaben."

"I desire you'll not have the boldness to address me," said the dowager, with excessive fierceness. "If family reasons induce persons who ought to know better to invite you among decent folks, at least you might have the decency to keep quiet in your corner."

"I keep quiet, mem!" exclaimed Maggie, bursting with wrath. "Who's the strarge here, I'd fain ken? I'm here among my ain kin; for the marriage of my ain lad wi' a led dy that's mair a led dy, an' a bower led dy too, than a' the Clochnabens that ever crooded on their beggarly midden: and I hae ye to ken that I dinna care *that* for ye airs and yere graces, and, if my mon's dea, that wad hae gi'en ye as gude as ye bring can tak' my ain pairt; if even I hadn't a lad come hame, and I'll"—

What more Maggie would have been snapping her white fingers with a rapid, resounding repetition of snaps in the irritated dowager's face, cannot be known. An hysterical burst of tears and howls began to wind up (or break down) her oration before she perceived that many of the gentlemen who had re-entered from dinner, all the ladies, were gazing at the scene in dismay.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KENNETH QUITE HIMSELF AGAIN.

It was a second or two before any other sound broke on Maggie's obstreperous sobbing, and then it was only a very feeble little chirp of sympathy from Lady Charlotte, who, trembling excessively, and locking her hand in that of her daughter, kept repeating, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear me! Oh, goodness! People really should not be so rude to people."

Kenneth, struck and stung, and conscious only that some dreaded exposure was taking place, just as he had been secretly exulting in the satisfactory blindness of his foreign wife to his mother's vulgarity; taking place, too, before all the gathered friends of his house and better kindred — flushed with wine, and always ungovernable in temper, strode forwards, and, grasping one of Maggie's large white arms (to which, as she continued to sob, he gave an impatient shake), delivered himself of the brief adjuration —

"Be quiet, mother; quiet, will you."

Then Lady Ross spoke; with that expression so rare in her soft countenance, which Sir Douglas remembered in the days when little Zizine was ill, and some ridicule seemed cast on Lady Charlotte's lamentings; an expression of reproach and command. "Kenneth, Kenneth Ross!" was all she said to him, but the one spoke volumes. Then, rising, while she still pressed the weak slender hand of her own nother, she turned to the cause of all this disturbance, and added, in a low tone, "Lady Clochnabhen, this was worse than rude; it was cruel."

So saying, she unlinked her hand from Lady Charlotte's, and, coming forward to Maggie, he said gently, addressing no one in particular, — "Mrs. Ross Heaton has had a great deal to gitate her lately, though some of the events" (and she smiled round at the beautiful Spaniard) "have been very pleasant ones. We mustn't wonder at a little fluctuation of spirits, and the room is very hot; I am afraid of giving Donna Eusebia cold, or I would open a window; but we will take a turn in the conservatory instead."

She was leading Maggie away, half sullen and half ashamed, when the tall black velvet robe barred her passage with a sort of mock-farewell —

"You'll scarcely expect me to stay, Lady Ross, though you did me the honour to invite me, without mentioning very particularly where to be your company. I'll not interfere in your care of Mistress Maggie Heaton. Looks, indeed, in very delicate health!"

and, without noticing Maggie's interruption, — "Oo! don't begin clawin' and scratchin' at me, ye great grim long-tailed black" — she added, "I'm quite aware that you did not wish to offend Mr. Kenneth; indeed, you've a good deal owing to that young fellow if all neighbours' tales are true; and

those that can't walk straight must just step crooked, that's my dictum; only I'd rather not be by while all's going on that is to go on here, I suppose, now he's come back again."

"Douglas, will you order Lady Clochnabhen's carriage, while Mrs. Ross Heaton and I gather some myrtle in the conservatory?" said her hostess.

The sweet voice was neither raised nor lowered. Lady Clochnabhen's words might have been drops of hail pattering against the window pane, for any apparent effect they produced on Gertrude.

Nor did she seem even conscious of the sudden stare of Maggie's eyes when Kenneth was so oddly mentioned. Only, as she gathered the sprig of myrtle, and her thoughts flew back on its pleasant aromatic odour to the Villa Mandorlo, and the "pergola" high above the blue Bay of Naples, she sighed to think that Lorimer Boyd called such a woman "mother!"

Maggie heard the sigh, and saw the abstracted eyes, and set the sigh down to a more obvious cause. In her opinion the sigh was for Kenneth; and Gertrude was very properly punished for jilting him, even by such insulting remarks as had been made by the long-tailed spiteful dowager in black velvet; and, though she thought Kenneth had done much better for himself in marrying such a beauty (with such a heap of jewels) as Donna Eusebia, still she felt a certain ignorant bitterness against the woman who had, in her opinion, been the cause of his long alienation from home, and from her own society at Torrieburn.

But Dowager Clochnabhen's conduct was not to be the only wonder of that evening.

When the two ladies returned to the rest of the company, the scene which had taken place seemed really almost effaced. The great crimson room was spacious enough to have made it difficult to hear gaunt Lady Clochnabhen's farewell speech, even if they had carefully listened. But no one was attempting to listen, or attending to that dowager's departure. The men guests were most of them a little "flushed" by the quantity of wine they had taken in honour of many toasts. Kenneth and one or two others were more than half drunk. Handsome Monzies of Poldoch and Craigievar was entirely absorbed in the notice taken of him by the radiant Spaniard. No one clearly understood, or very much cared, what had occurred; and it was quite easy to accept the solution that Mrs. Ross Heaton had been in nervous spirits, and had taken something amiss that was not intended to be so taken. Quiet was restored, and social converse, not grave but gay. Glass after glass of curacao and maraschino, imbibed by way of *chase café*, added to the feverish flush on Kenneth's cheek, and to the careless merriment of others. Then Donna Eusebia, — having duly rested in attitudes of the most piquant grace, and of the most astonishing and shifting variety, — was called upon to sing; and, after much pretty reluctance,

tance, the party being so "big," and she "but a poor stranger with a small little talent," consented; and went through all those sweet varieties of melancholy passion and martial animation, and tiny stamps and long-drawn "Ays," from the first sighing *modinha* to the last rapid bolero in her *répertoire*; while Monzies of Poldoch's nascent moustache positively trembled with admiration, and Kenneth watched this new effect of his wife's music with the haughtiest displeasure. Gertrude sang too. Lovely and sweet was her voice; pure and perfect the style; nimble the white fingers that wandered familiarly among the ivory keys without requiring written music. But what was the use of any one singing when Donna Eusebia was by? Unless, indeed, to rest that most fascinating warbler, and enable her to consider what next she would do to dazzle, enchant, and madden. At length even her amazing stock of treasures in the musical way seemed exhausted. "I can no more, and I have no more," she said; and looked up with a smile at the listening Monzies, who felt as if those dark liquid eyes had flattered over him, settled upon him, and covered him up with warm folded wings.

"Oh yes, you have more," exclaimed Kenneth. "A beautiful thing; two beautiful things; that 'Mexican Mountaineers' Hymn,' or whatever you call it, and the 'Lament of Matamoros.'"

But they both required a different sort of accompaniment, she said: she was accustomed to play them on the guitar while her cousin played the pianoforte; they were nothing without that. The bells of the mules in the mountain-pass must be imitated on the piano, while the hymn of the mountaineers was sung to the guitar. Besides, there should be a man's voice also. The hymn was poor without that. Kenneth might remember it was always sung so by her cousin, the Duc de Martos, at Granada.

Then occurred the second startling event of the evening. Mr. James Frere—who had been sitting very quietly by Miss Alice Ross in a distant corner—rose from his place, and gravely proffered his assistance.

Did he know the "Hymn of the Mexican Mountaineers?"

Yes; he believed so. If it was the same: if she would pardon his awkwardness. And Mr. Frere ran his meagre fingers very lightly over the keys, playing the air *en sourdine*.

Yes, certainly; that was it; that would do perfectly. Did he also know the "Lament of Matamoros?"

He thought he did. He was no musician, but these were remarkable national airs, and he had heard them very often from a very interesting young friend; in fact, a young American missionary: a very pious and amiable person, since dead. He only proposed his services that others might not be disappointed of the wonderful pleasure of hearing Donna Euse-

bias; imperfect services, but he would do his best.

And forthwith the performance commenced.

If Mr. James Frere spoke truth when he said he was no musician, he must have had great ability for learning by ear. No fault could be detected in his playing; the voice, so noticeably strong in his preaching, gave now the impression of skilfully-subdued strength, and of an attentive calculation how to leave all the effects of the song to the lovely Spanish. Never, for one semiquaver of time, did Mr. Frere seem to forget that he was merely singing, "that others might not be disappointed of the wonderful pleasure of hearing Donna Eusebia!"

She felt it. She looked at him, when the hymn was concluded, with a long gaze of searching curiosity. That "high-born Spanish ladie" was by no means shy. She did not pretend to be shy. She looked him over, from the crown of his obsequious head, past that scar on his hand, to the tips of his fingers, as she had looked over many other specimens of the same sex; a sex created to admire, court, and entertain her. And having so perused him, she looked up at Kenneth with a smile, near her white teeth on the top of her fan, and murmured, in Spanish,—"He says he is no musician; but that is a little fib. He is a *jugador*."

And Mr. Frere answered (also in Spanish) that what he had stated was true. That he had not studied music; that he played almost entirely by ear; that he had no time for studies. His occupations were too generally too absorbing; he should consider it wrong to indulge himself in the pursuit of music. He had not sung for a very long period "until this evening."

During the greater portion of this performance, the Italian Giuseppe had been waiting for a pause to advance and obey the imperative signal of Kenneth for more liquor. His attention was now so riveted on the matter, that Kenneth at last angrily roared, with a "*Cosa c'è?*"

Only that Giuseppe had seen that somewhere, before, somewhere: he could not remember where: but certainly somewhere he had seen him, and heard him sing.

And, in spite of Kenneth's cross laugh, his observation that there was nothing very extraordinary in the fact, even if it were so, Giuseppe kept puzzling his simple brain when he saw when he had seen this English stranger.

There was something unsatisfactory in the recollection of the man; but he could not clearly made out what it was. Only that thing he was quite certain, he did not know Mr. James Frere for the first time.

Meanwhile, much praise was bestowed that individual; and to the question of Sir Douglas, why he had never allowed his friends to know of his talent before, Mr. Frere replied, with much simplicity, that no one had ever asked him if he could sing; adding,

a gentle sigh, that he had already given his reasons why, in his position, it was not a talent he could desire to cultivate. As to his knowledge of the Spanish language, it was very limited. He had tried to make himself conversant with most modern languages, not knowing where Providence might lead him in the career he had desired to embrace. The usefulness of a missionary's labours would be much impeded if his ignorance of all tongues but his own prevented communion with such as might most need his ministry when abroad.

And then Mr. Frere vanished once more into the background, and resumed his place by Alice Ross.

But Alice sat pale and silent, and gave no sign of welcome.

Presently Maggie rose with a yawn and a stretch, and, expressing her opinion that it would be far more "cooth and cosey" if Kenneth would come at once to Torrieburn, and that she had no doubt "Donna Euseebie" would find things well enough "sorted" there, without further trouble—and at all events "auld cats in black velvet" would not be able to intrude unasked and crow over her—took her son's arm, and, bidding a rather sulky farewell to the rest of the party, departed.

When Kenneth returned from putting her into the carriage, the heated angry look which had been deepening in his face was fiercer than before. No doubt poor tactless Maggie had been saying to her wayward son whatever was least fitted for the occasion. He cast a restless glance at his Spanish bride, who was coquetting with all the might of her eyes and fun with Monzies of Craigievar: advanced towards them: muttered something about "coxcombs in fancy dresses," with a scornful glance at the extremely decorated belt and dirk of that dandy of the hills: and bluntly interrupting Donna Eusebia, told her he thought she had better follow his mother's example, and say good-night to the company.

At first Donna Eusebia smiled, and said "her eyes were not sleepy, and she would not shut up the poor things in the dark against their will." But, when a hurried sentence or two had been spoken by Kenneth with increasing irritation, she also flashed fire. The eyes that were not sleepy seemed positively to expand with anger, and the tiny foot beat with a rapid, tremulous, passionate beat on the ground. Kenneth turned from her, and spoke to the young Highlander; what he said was not very clear, but the tone of insolence was what no man could brook. He was answered with equal pride and impatience. Sir Douglas saw and heard nothing of what was passing, for he was deep in some colloquy with one of the soldier Forbeses; but Gertrude was observing them. She came rapidly forward. "Mr. Ross! Kenneth!" was all she said; but she said it in the same tone that had offended him before during that evening. He laughed bitterly. "Now that is prime," he said, with a thick drunken utterance. "You think, because I was once

so fond of you that you could have twisted me round your finger, that you're to govern me all my life! No such thing, my dear aunt! (You're my dear 'aunt' now, you know.) If my dear uncle had not much authority in old days (as, indeed, why should he?), a dear aunt shouldn't attempt—shouldn't attempt—to—to tyrannize. I don't want to quarrel with Monzies," added he, with a tipsy smile, "he's a good fellow, and I'm ready to shake hands with him—to shake hands; it's women that are in fault. All women. They're all alike; all d——d coquettees. You were a coquette; and Eusebia's a coquette; and I daresay Alice—Aunt Alice—she's a coquette, too—for all she's so demure—and"—

The drunken speech was apparently arrested by the quiet approach of the last-named object of animadversion. A noiseless gliding step had brought pussy-cat Alice close to the group. It is impossible to describe the expression of her eyes while watching Kenneth; amusement, malice, curiosity, and a set determination, were so blended in their half-shut gleaming. Behind her stood Mr. Frere. Something in their silent contemplation of him checked Kenneth, and recalled him a little to himself.

"Are you two gifted with second sight, and looking at some vision of the future?" he said, with a sneer.

"I am," answered Alice Ross, quietly; and the odd little smile crept round her thin mouth, and left it.

Mr. Frere turned away with a pious sigh, and crossed the spacious room to the corner where Sir Douglas was engaged in military gossip with his elder guests.

"Good-night, Mr. Monzies," Gertrude said, as she held out her hand to him. "Do not sit late with Kenneth, discussing the naughtiness of woman, and," added she, with rather a nervous smile, "do not either of you forget that this was a meeting of friends."

The young man bowed low over the gentle hand extended to him; and Donna Eusebia rose, in answer to the still gentler beckoning which summoned her rebellious eyes to sleep. She shrugged her shoulders with a departing glance of anger at Kenneth, and passed up the great staircase with Alice and her hostess sister-in-law.

Very late—long after the last wheels had passed down the approach, bearing away the non-resident guests—Gertrude was startled by hearing the voice of Kenneth once more in anger. She had not slept. She could not sleep. She had heard him come up the stairs and along the corridor with the heavy, stumbling, irregular step of an intoxicated man. Then a stillness. Then the inexplicable sounds of angry speaking, and something more—stamping, or shaking of a door; she could not make out what. All of a sudden a great crash. Gertrude could scarcely repress a scream. "Oh Douglas!" she said, something has happened! Kenneth—Kenneth had a quarrel—I—I fear"—

She listened again; doubtful, wondering; for now she thought she could distinctly hear a woman's voice. Sir Douglas opened the dressing-room door, and passed down the corridor.

At the door of her own room stood Lady Charlotte, quaking with fear.

"It is Kenneth," she said; "he is very angry. He has burst in the door."

"What door?"

"The door of his room, I think. That is all; only it frightened me so."

Sir Douglas returned to his wife.

"Kenneth is not sober," he said with a sigh. "I suppose he could not turn the handle of his door. He has forced it; that was the sound you heard. I am so vexed, my love, that you were startled out of your sleep!"

Gertrude said nothing. She partly guessed what had happened, and her conjecture was confirmed in the morning by Lady Charlotte, who narrated — with many agitated pulls at the long curl which assisted in all her emotions — how she had heard Kenneth desire Donna Eusebia to open the door that led into his dressing-room. How the Donna had replied she would never see him again, and meant to leave the castle at daylight. How, after further parleying for a minute or two, there was a dead pause, and then a crash, and then Kenneth's voice in the inner room, "dreadfully angry;" and many angry answers and weeping; and then his voice apparently apologizing, and excusing what he had done.

"And oh! my darling, it did so remind me," said poor Lady Charlotte, "of that dreadful day, you know, at Villa Mandorlo, when he threatened to kill Sir Douglas, and would insist on your loving *him* instead, and all that! And I can't think why he can't be contented now, and not behave like — like a corsair — or something dreadful. But I'm very glad it isn't you! I mean, that you are not married to him. And one comfort is, that I should think his wife was very brave; she looks brave. There was once a Spanish woman who fired off a cannon, you know. The Maid of — of Saragossa, she was called. And I believe they are all very daring. I'm sure Donna Eusebia seemed to me as if she would mind neither swords nor pistols. She gives me that idea. Such a slender creature, too! But that's no rule. She wouldn't mind the Grand Turk I'm sure she wouldn't!"

"Well," said Gertrude, with a sigh and a smile; "let us hope she will not mind this outrage either. Say nothing of it to Sir Douglas. He only thinks Kenneth Ross got drunk — as usual."

Nothing of it to Sir Douglas!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. FRERE DISPLAYS ANOTHER TALENT USEFUL ON MISSIONARY STATIONS.

It was not without some little echo of her mother's trepidation that Gertrude watched for

the entrance of Kenneth Ross and his wife at breakfast that morning.

The *esclandre* of a parting, in the very midst of bridal festivities; what a climax to that wayward young man's affairs!

But no such catastrophe was impending. When the newly-married couple re-appeared — which they did at separate intervals, Kenneth lounging in long after the usual breakfast-hour — no trace of the stormy scene of the previous night remained. It might have been an evil dream, for any symptom even of its recollection apparent in the two persons principally concerned.

Kenneth had obviously been forgiven. Probably his bride had had previous opportunities of judging what effect excess of drinking would have on his conduct. She even, to Gertrude's intense amazement, alluded to it with the pretty playful coquetry of manner, and sweet broken English, of which she so well knew the charm. It was a question "what should be done" that morning; and it was agreed that no shooting or separation of parties should take place. They were all to take boat, and row or sail down the lake, and dine picnic at "the Hut;" a little edifice of stone walls and heather roof, begun by Old Sir Douglas and his brother when they were boys, aided by the keeper.

There, flushed and lovely, they had lifted logs of odorous lately-chipped fir-branches; and stretched their strenuous young arms to build and contrive; panting always to return to the delicious employment, in the midst of carelessly-learned lessons at Glenrossie, and home coercion, such as it was. There, the beloved little rough dogs, afterwards hung by their cold-blooded step-mother, had fuzzled and rustled among the brown autumn leaves, feeling called upon to partake the excitement though they could not share the employment of their masters; and sympathizing thoroughly in the opinion of the latter, that the greater the bustle the greater the joy. Poor little Jock and Beardi! Before that dreadful hanging day, how many days of delight had they shared! What kindly pat and invitations had they received to share bits of oatcake and potatoes roasted in the hut (tasting terribly of burnt resinous wood); while their masters added to that simple festival, and "just a wee, wee drappie" of mountain dew, sipped from the keeper's flask, ever replenished with a fiery nectar, which, like the potatoes had been prepared in some wild mountain hole, where the tax of the excise-officer had never been levied.

Days of boyhood and castle-building on the earth (not yet the vain vanishing of manhood's castles in the air), how sweet and precious are ye, even in the after times!

Oh! little huts, and bowers, and play-places — by many a mountain-lake and rush-fringed stream, or wild sea-shore, or in the depth of mellow autumn woods, — does no ghost haunt you? no sweet Egeria dwell there, giving perpetual invitations to return to the peace and innocence, the complete beliefs and holy igno-

rance, which were our own in those days? Where are the echoes of those young voices, whose every sound of common calling was like a glad triumphant shout? Where is the dancing light of youthful eyes, that flashed eagerly radiant and clear as stars; eyes that knew no heaviness, and whose tears were shed in such brief showers? Where are ye, young companions, close-knit ties, sportive inhabitants of a paradise where sorrow endured for a day, and joy came with the morning; where the lament for irrevocable loss, and the long dreary alienation of maturer quarrels, were alike unknown? Return to us—return! Return! stream of life with the sparkle on it, from a light that no longer shines!

It cannot be. As well ask for the harebells that waved in the mountain breeze in some long-forgotten spring; the foxglove that grew by the woodland bowler, and smiled down on the autumn fern, where now, perhaps, stands some busy wayside inn, thronged and crowded!

But this one bower—of the thousands that lie scattered about, sadder than tombs, among the play-places of forgotten generations—had been carefully tended through all days of external change. Kenneth of Torriehurn had first repaired it, and made a fishing-lodge of it,—for love of absent Douglas, his Eton brother, his soldier brother, his brother far away! Sir Douglas had had it afterwards sacredly kept, for love of the dead brother he had loved so well. Little Kenneth the orphan had been taken to it as to a haunt of memory and love; and there often had Sir Douglas told how the father he could not remember had helped to build it. And in these latter times Gertrude saw to the re-thatching with heather in bloom, and fresh fir-supports, of that simple edifice; sacred to the past, when “Old Sir Douglas” was a blooming boy!

It was still, what it was then,—a favourite haunt of the dwellers in Glenroskie; and many a day the silence of the sweet rocky shore was broken by voices—there, and “in the broomy knoves under the birken trees,” where poor Maggie Heaton, in the days of her girlish beauty, listened to Kenneth’s father—and fell.

A merry day now they had on that placid shore; and it was on their landing that the beautiful Spaniard gave utterance to the speech which so surprised Gertrude, as containing a gayer allusion than she would have thought possible to Kenneth’s unhappy vice of drunkenness.

Of the three boats containing the party, Kenneth’s touched the shore first, steered by the Neapolitan Giuseppe, who had become a sort of necessity of life to that spoilt child of fortune.

He handed out his bride, who, touching lightly with her thin-shod little foot on the landing-board, looked up at the rustic *fuca* where her own name and the word “Bienvenída!” had been woven, in rich colours with dahlias and hollyhocks intermingled with flowering myrtle.

“Ah!” she said, “that is my own little

house, my *doscansadéro*, a *palomár* for Kennet and me. Now, walk into my ‘habitation’ straight, very straight, much straighter than you could have walk last night, or I will make a very angry ‘*ama di casa*.’ And drink no drink but the lake water, and that only ‘with your eyes,’ like the pretty song of your English poet. For into my ‘*palomár*’ shall come only loving birds; no ‘*solterón*,’ no stupid old bachelor, nor tipsy man; in this sunshine shall not even the ‘*sombrage*’ of such a one be allowed—only the young, the gay, the handsome,—and Sir Douglas!”

The coquettish flash of the large dark eyes at young ‘*raigievar*’ during the first words of the concluding phrase was lost in the merry laugh of all, at the pause which preceded Sir Douglas’s name. He smiled.

“You cannot, at least, make me an exception as an old bachelor,” said he, gayly; “so let all the boat’s crew land, and sit outside Donna Eusebia’s ‘*doscansadéro*,’ for I am sure inside there will only be room for the ladies.”

The day was beautiful; the tempers of all as cloudless as the sky; and the little exaggerated order to drink “only water,” very slightly infringed upon by the general company; while the poet’s line,

“Drink to me only with thine eyes,”

was certainly very strictly obeyed by young Monzie, if by no one else.

But, though Eusebia was coquettish as ever (for, indeed, it was not in her nature to be otherwise), her coqueries were reserved for Kenneth, with very isolated exceptions. That crumb of notice when she landed, and spoke of “the young and handsome,” was all she vouchsafed to the admiring Highlander that day; or rather that morning, for she relapsed a little, going home by the boat in the early moonlight. She did what many coquettes do, with an assurance and an *aplomb* perfectly amazing,—she seemed to forget the very existence of the man she had chatted with so eagerly and familiarly the night before; to be unconscious that he was there; or, at least, that his being there was at all a matter that concerned her. The beautiful eyes sent their glances about like shooting stars; but with the same effect of meteoric distance. She looked across him, and up over his head and beyond, and past his shoulder, and at the sprig of white heather that lay by his plate, but never at him, as she had done the previous evening. At which change Craigievar was a good deal nettled and troubled, but only held his beardless chin a little more proudly and stiffly, and addressed his conversation chiefly to his host Sir Douglas, and Gertrude, without intruding on Eusebia.

After luncheon, a climbing walk along delicious paths shaded by birch trees and full of fairy knolls, with glimpses ever-varying of the silver lake and far-away mountains, with the one rocky crag conspicuous in the foreground

on which Clochnaben Castle was built, employed their time; and they returned to the "descansadero," where was blazoned forth in flowers the foreign bride's name, without a thought that could mar the genial gaiety of the day.

Donna Eusebia, indeed, was so full of frolic and effusion, that she turned and took a personal farewell of the flut; kissing the fir-wood lintel posts under the dahlias and hollyhocks, on either side, — as she would have kissed the cheeks of some dowager in a cap wreathed with roses.

"Adios! adios! pretty habitación with your *adereço* of flowers! I will live much in you. When Kenneth is good I will come with him, and when he is bad I shall come without him; and you shall be all *desflorecida*. Adios!"

And with the last playful *adios* Donna Eusebia stepped into the boat which had brought her, with Sir Douglas and Gertrude, Lady Charlotte and Kenneth. The other two boats lay off, ready to start in company. Alice Ross, and one or two of the guests at the Castle, with the inseparable Mr. James Frere occupied one. The other merely reconveyed two of the gardeners who had been employed during the early morning in decorating the hut, according to Gertrude's design, and the servants who had prepared luncheon. Giuseppe was in the boat with Kenneth. It was the only one that had a sail besides the two rowers; but the wind was light, and not favourable; so Giuseppe was reclining in the most Italian attitude of *dolce far niente*, all languor, except his quick black eyes, which waired Kenneth's commands; and, receiving none, looked back again down on the unruffled water; dreaming, perhaps, of the blue Bay of Naples, and patient little Nanella still reading his treasured deputy-written love-letters, and expecting his long-delayed return.

The party were seated, and Kenneth was arranging a plaid round Donna Eusebia, when she once more stood up, and, with a long musical note of such sweet and passionate intonation that it woke an answering echo from the shore, sang out "Adios!" once again. Enchanted with the effect, she repeated it, with all the strength of her fine voice. Then she called out to Mr. Frere, and asked Gertrude to join, and that cadence in unison came back to them. Then, with one last adieu, she waved her hands to the hut, laughing and kissing her finger-tips as she did so, and the boat pushed off.

But, in the very act of waving her hands, that precious bracelet with all its dangling lockets of rubies and diamonds, which she had been obliged to take off when accompanying herself on the piano, unfastened at the clasp, and fell into the lake!

"My bracelet! My bracelet! My bracelet that Kenneth gave me before we marry!"

"Giuseppe!" exclaimed Kenneth.

And Giuseppe — so languid a minute ago — all life and activity, leaped up, and in a moment more would have dived for the lost treasure. But even at that instant, Mr. Frere's

voice called out, "I see it! Non tate l'acqua!" (Do not disturb the water.)

As he spoke, he flung his coat into the boat, and plunged into the lake. He rose again, having failed to recover the glittering treasure, gazed downwards eagerly, plunged once more, and seized it, as it curled in among the little rocks that bordered the wild shore by the hut.

His hand was cut and bleeding from the effort he had made among the stones. He swam towards the boat where Donna Eusebia was seated, and lifted the bracelet in triumph as he touched the boat's side.

"Madre di Dio! Santo José! Santissima Marie! I recognize him! I know him!" exclaimed Giuseppe. "Touch not his bracelet, Signora mia; touch him not, Eccellenza!"

Giuseppe bent over the boat's side with a mixture of animation and repulsion difficult to comprehend. Mr. Frere seized his arm, and rapid words in Italian — a wild look of alarm on the part of James Frere — a vehement withdrawal of his arm on the part of Giuseppe — and the bracelet was handed back to Donna Eusebia.

"I am too wet to be a good companion," said Mr. Frere, somewhat breathlessly. "Give me my coat; I will walk home."

"I will walk with you," said Kenneth, "had rather. I hate the cramped-up sensation of a boat; and I am not very partial to notions of diving."

He looked at Giuseppe, as he spoke, with a smile; and Gertrude shuddered, for she remembered only too well the day at Naples — the wild drunken talk — the dreadful part — the narrow escape from death, and the long watches of the dreary night that he had fagged and worn Sir Douglas!

Involuntarily she looked in that kindly way, and sighed, and held out her hand. He pressed it. He also remembered.

But Giuseppe's eyes followed only Mr. Frere; and, as the boat once more touched the shore, and Kenneth leaped lightly out, his hand on Frere's dripping shoulder, a expression almost of fierceness came over his honest sunburnt brow.

"If the young Excellency did but know," muttered he.

The other boats also drew to the shore, and young Craigievar was invited to replace Kenneth in the leading bark.

Then it was that the lovely Spaniard resumed her conquering sway over the experienced victim of her fascination; and talked in her broken English, and talked with fingers and her eyes, while the early moon went into the sky with one companion star, and Douglas and Gertrude sat rather silently, thinking of Kenneth; of his past and future. And Lady Charlotte pulled and curl meditatively: and repeated to herself what she had previously said to Sir Douglas — namely, that the beautiful Spaniard "like something in a story: something real, you know. But of course, she is

Only I cannot accustom myself to her. And she is so very different. Different, I mean, from you, dear! But men do love such different people. They go on choosing and loving, and loving and choosing, till really one don't know what they would be at. Still I'm glad of course that you ain't married to him, and — and I hope she'll behave herself."

Meanwhile Kenneth and his companion made their way by the footpath at the edge of the lake and inland; glancing from time to time at the boats as they came in sight. And, when they all met again, and Mr. Frere had gone to his apartment to change his clothes, Kenneth pronounced, with more warmth than usual, that he was "a capital fellow;" "a most entertaining fellow;" and he wouldn't object to have a walk with him every day; only he had rather bored him with his prejudices against the Italians (having observed that he had an Italian servant). He was full of the ridiculous notion that they were extremely deceitful and treacherous; scheming, and all that; even went so far as to remark on Giuseppe's countenance; said it was a "malignant" face, whereas there was not a better-natured animal in all Naples; and told some long story of an Italian valet who had murdered his master in some wild out-of-the-way place, and had then taken his clothes, his passport, and his name, and passed for years as the man himself! a thing which, after all, might have happened anywhere. Frere had also asked him (Kenneth) how long Giuseppe had been in his service, and whether he meant to keep him, and all that sort of thing. Of course he meant to keep him; never had a servant he liked so well.

But, apparently, Giuseppe himself was getting a little restless; for the very next day after the boating expedition, he came to Kenneth, and pleaded that now the young Excellency was once more among friends, and among servants of his house, he might dispense with the poor Neapolitan, and the desire of heart that had been kept tranquil while his young Excellency had need of him, grew strong now to go and marry Nanella, even as the Excellency had married the beautiful lady of his choice, whom might all the saints preserve for ever!

Kenneth's anger was unbounded at this proposal. It was all nonsense. He was used to Giuseppe, and he saw no reason at all why he should be deprived of his services. He offered him more wages: he swore and stormed: finally he expostulated, and worked on the better part of poor Giuseppe's easy nature, saying he was certain he should be ill again and require him; till at last the arrangement was made that Giuseppe should have temporary leave of absence to see his mother and marry Nanella: and, if Nanella would come with him to England and to Scotland, she should be installed as superior in the laundry; and, if she would not come, Giuseppe must absolutely

return for a year into Kenneth's service, till he could look out for a suitable substitute.

So, with many ejaculations and much humble hand-kissing, Giuseppe departed.

Before he went he asked to speak with Gertrude; and was called into the bright morning room, where she was working, and Sir Douglas reading.

But, whether the presence of the latter was more than Giuseppe had reckoned on, and intimidated him, or from whatever other cause, the young Neapolitan became agitated and confused; and all that could be gathered was, that he had desired to put their Excellencies on their guard against Mr. Frere. He called him "Mr. Frere," though — the saints forgive him — he knew that could not be the signor's name. He was well assured he had indeed seen him before; and when he saw him swimming, and with his hand uplifted and bleeding, then all was clear to him; and though the Signor Frere denied his identity, and said he had never been in Italy, yet he, Giuseppe, knew that it was not so; and he was proceeding to say more, — in his own verbose and confused way, — when the gentle tap of pussy-cat Alice at the door of the morning room and her gliding entrance stopped him. Alice looked at him, as if she also had something to say, and was waiting his departure; but when he was gone she only smiled an answering smile to Sir Douglas's look of welcome, and took out her favourite work of floss silk and chenille, and told Gertrude she had come "for a little advice" about going over to Clochnaben, for she did not like to quarrel with one of her dear mother's oldest friends, and yet she did not like to make the visit if Gertrude objected to continue on good terms with the Dowager after the unfortunate little *sallie* of the night of the dinner-party.

Young Lady Rose smiled quietly. "I hope the single sentence of rebuke I uttered will not interrupt our good neighbourhood," she said; "and, at all events, that it will in no way change the relations in which others stand to Lady Clochnaben. Douglas will ride over with you; and, if Donna Eusebia would like to make the call and see the grim old castle, Kenneth can drive her in my pony chaise. I am going to walk with my mother and my little boy to see his old nurse. We have been so busy with company lately, that no such holidays have come about. — If Mr. Frere" —

Here Gertrude paused and looked doubtfully at Sir Douglas, who answered hastily — "Oh! my love, you don't suppose for a moment that I should heed the mysterious warning which that rambling fellow Giuseppe has taken it into his head to give us! I never heard a syllable that could lead me to think Frere had visited Italy, and he talks freely enough of the places and people he has seen. Besides, what are we to suppose the simple fellow meant? I think we need hardly expect Frere to turn into a robber chief, or a Roderick Dhu, because Kenneth's man fancies he recognizes him."

"I was going to say that we could mount Mr. Frere as well as Kenneth, and some others of the party, if you would give orders about the horses."

"Well, I dare say Alice will not object to that," said Sir Douglas, with a smile; "the more the merrier. Let us prepare a cavalry march upon Clochnaben Castle, and call on the grim lady of the castle to surrender at discretion. James Frere's visit here ends to-day, and it will be a very brilliant sort of escort, to re-conduct him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

TIES THAT WON'T BIND.

To the verbs which the Clochnaben factor had declared to be *caret* in her ladyship's vocabulary, — namely, *to love* and *to give*, — might certainly be added the verb *to pardon*.

That even Heaven itself should pardon sin, had always jarred upon that stern Dowager's clearer sense of the proper temporal and eternal rules with reference to right and wrong. She had once condescended — not to argue the point — but in an interrogative form to express an opinion on this point to the deceased Savile Heaton, who had faltered out something about "Christian indulgence" in her presence.

"Now that is so like Lorimer, Mr. Heaton! that nonsense which you have just talked, about indulgence! One would think he had bit you, and inoculated you with his wild notions. Christian indulgence won't go down with me, I can tell you. Horrid slip-slop! Means nothing but 'don't care,' and 'Don't Care,' as we all know, came to the gallows. Why, Lord love you, man, — if the bad are to get off scot free the moment they put a pocket-handkerchief to their eyes or find time to drop down on their wanton marrow bones, — what's the use of being good? If pardons are to drop down from heaven like manna, whenever they're wanted, then it's all up with justice; — that's my dictum. I don't believe it: and I hope those that sin, and then think to run away from the consequences, will find the devil's pitchfork in their backs before they've run far. There's Heaven for one set of folks, hin't there? and the Lake of Brimstone for the other? That's your creed, I suppose, if you're anything of a Churchman: and you can't pop the wheat and tares into the same barn — (I'm thankful to say), — however willing you might be to do it."

Mr. Savile Heaton had had the presumption to commence a demurrer to this argument: — "The very essence of Christianity," said he, "in the great doctrine of redemption" —

But here he was cut short, and mowed down, and unthrew up among the bundle of condemned tares in Lady Clochnaben's spiritual barn.

"Essence of fiddlesticks!" said she, snappishly. "You are not expected to get to heaven by a saunter over the hills, but by a path cut

for you; and if you go out of it, worse luck for you. You needn't, you know, unless you choose. Lorimer once asked me, — his mother — (for he has no more idea of respect than the sail of a windmill, but just whirls round to his point), — whether I felt sure of heaven: and I told him certainly I *did*; I never committed a known sin in all my life, and I suppose I've had my temptations like other people."

Lady Clochnaben had paused here in her discourse, and settled her black bonnet with rather a discontented jerk, for she had an uncomfortable recollection of her son's manner on that occasion: of his asking whether she also "gave tithes of all she possessed:" and of his muttering a quotation to himself (a habit of his which particularly irritated her) in a most unconvinced tone: —

"Whom thou dost injure, — thou, that dost not strike,

What thou dost covet, — thou, that dost not steal,

God knows; who made temptations all unlike,

But sin the same."

And, as Mr. Savile Heaton had no ready quotations, beyond Scripture texts, and merely gave a gentle sigh in answer to the *finale* of her tirade, there was nothing left to fight about in those by-gone days.

But now, at this present time, with the inhabitants of Glenrossie Castle (those tares, growing up in undeserved sunshine within telescopic range of her own sternly immaculate windows!), there appeared to the dowager a great deal to fight about; and if, in her opinion, the manna of celestial pardon ought not to fall and be gathered by chance sinners, whose cases did not even come under her observation or interest her in any way, — how should she pardon Gertrude the sinful laxity of receiving Maggie Heaton? and that yet more amazing lapse from the right path, which had prompted her to rebuke her guest for impressing on Maggie her true position? Was it possible that even to her, the Countess of Clochnaben, — "an awful woman to contravene," and Lady Ross's superior in every way, — the words had been addressed which censured her as "worse than rude — *cruel*!" And by whom were these words spoken, — with that high and mighty air which mealy-mouthed Madam could assume when she chose, though generally she kept her spirit under? By whom? By a chit of a girl, the daughter of that affected fool and dandling goose, Lady Charlotte Skifton! Skifton, indeed! a nice name to tack Lady Charlotte's to, who came of well-born people, and was cousin, twice removed, to Lady Clochnaben herself! Who was Mr. Skifton? Who was his daughter, that she should venture — that she should dare address a Scotch magnate in such words of reprobation? Forgive her! Certainly not. She should be punished: she deserved punishment. People with a keener conscience than

the self-righteous Dowager might call it vengeance; but it was, in her opinion, the strictest justice. Gertrude should be punished, that was quite settled; even if Lady Clochnaben had a good opinion of her in other respects, which she had not. She had jilted Kenneth, and coquetted with Lorimer, and married Douglas from the basest motives of self-interest: that was clear as the day.

"Man, who art thou that judgest another? To his own Master he standeth or falleth,"—was a text which had never particularly impressed this female Draco. It must somehow have slipped out of her Bible.

And Alice Ross also thought Gertrude should be punished: though she would have found it difficult to say for what. For being lovely, and much beloved, and ruling, without seeming to rule, and occupying the place of lady of the castle which Alice herself would fain have continued to fill.

Mr. Frere too was of opinion Gertrude should be punished. He was satisfied that she would be reserved for eternal condemnation in the next world, but he thought she ought also to be chastened in this: and that, although she might not be decapitated like Queen Mary, she might yet endure such sorrow as the Lord might be pleased to send, to work out her eventual salvation.

Nor was it very long before Donna Eusebia also considered that she ought to be punished. Very skilful and undermining were the tactics of Alice; very broad and daring the tactics of the Pharisee of Clochnaben; but their end was the same. The passionate vain Spaniard was gradually brought to know all that these other ladies knew or thought. That her husband had all but drowned himself for love of Gertrude, who after all had most unexpectedly thrown him over and married the wealthy Ross of Glenrossie, though all her "friends" were convinced that in reality her heart was set on his nephew. That Lady Charlotte had married a merchant, a mere nobody, which accounted for the crafty ambition of his daughter, who was determined to take the best match she could get, without reference to her affections. That Maggie was a vile lost creature, who never would have held her head up or been heard of in the county, but for the monstrous step taken by Lady Ross, and by Sir Douglas at her instigation, of countenancing her, and treating her as an acknowledged connexion of the family. All this, with much pity for Donna Eusebia, and hints of her being utterly thrown away, with her amazing beauty and accomplishments. But the spiteful little pecks at Kenneth were very carefully given, for it was very obvious that as yet the Spanish lady was what is called "very much in love" with her very handsome husband, and Kenneth on his side "very much in love" with her.

Nothing could equal Eusebia's anger at the discovery of her mother-in-law's position.

That Kenneth had deceived her in more ways than one as to the circumstances surround-

ing his home was very evident. Her astonishment at the inferiority of Torrieburn in all but the picturesqueness of its situation and scenery: and her discontent at the arrangements made for her reception there, lavish as they had been in proportion to Kenneth's real means: her irritation at the insufficiency of the smaller establishment to fulfil her notions of luxury,—were vehement and un concealed. She clinched those *mignonne* pianoforte-playing fingers, with nearly as much passion as untutored Maggie herself; while she exclaimed to Lady Ross, "Ah, these men! Kenneth tell me this, his place of Torrie, was yet more beautiful than his uncle's; and see now! What 'vileza' is here! But I shall not live here. As well live in the little hut on the lake. Better, indeed!"

And Donna Eusebia's black eyes assumed a lurid fierceness instead of their habitual expression of languid coquetry, as she reflected how many lies, during their many roamings through the halls of the Abencerrages in the Alhambra, when Kenneth was courting her, that very handsome young Englishman must have told, or indirectly led her to believe, since her dreams at Granada of "this place of Torrie" had been so very different from the reality! How completely Kenneth,—always rather affected and beastful about his personal belongings, and at that time, perhaps (so lately snatched from death in his fever at Seville), really pining somewhat for home-ties and home—had pretended that all the grandeur and crumbling glory of the palace of the Moorish kings could not wean his heart from the dear and lovely memory of Scotland! How he had expatiated on the enchanting recollections of Glenrossie and Torrieburn, and spoken of the two places as equally magnificent possessions; both estates somewhat approaching in value those of the Spanish Duc d'Ossuna and the Scottish Duke of Hamilton!

Deceitful! Kenneth!"

"Lovers' oaths" are proverbially most insecure anchors for faith to hold by. But "lovers' lies" are yet more betraying. The best of men add, voluntarily or involuntarily, a little to the warmth and light of the future they are persuading another to share. The picture indeed is there, but, like all who are showing off a picture, they hold a clear light over it and shade that light with their hand, that it may be seen to the best advantage.

Happy the woman who does not require the "make-weight" of a home of splendour when she accepts the man of her choice. Gertrude would have been content to live in a settler's log-cabin with Sir Douglas. But even she would doubtless have felt greatly disturbed and discouraged if she had found those long colloquies during pleasant evenings spent at the Villa Mandorlo in describing Glenrossie, to be a tissue of fables. Not for the sake of the home, but the character of its master. Kenneth's mis-statements did not spring from the enthusiasm of the poet, who feels sure that the honey of Hybla will turn into roast beef and silver dishes;

nor the artist's, who dreams of a repetition in his case of the fate of Cimabue; nor the lawyer's, who, though not quite without a hope of the wool-sack, feels certain that at least he will come to be a judge; for all these offer what they believe they will attain; and, if it prove a deception in after years, it is a deception which they honestly shared. No! Kenneth's was a deliberate, prosaic exaggeration, to help him to obtain the hand of the beautiful Spaniard, the cousin of the Duke of Martos, the daughter of grandees. He had not wooed her like the yearning lover in the old Scotch song:—

"I would I were a baron's heir,
That I with pearls might braid your hair;
I'd make ye bright as ye are fair,
Lassie! gin ye'd lo'e me!
But I hae naught to offer thee,
Nor gems from mine, nor pearls from sea,—
For I am come of low degree,
—Lassie! but I lo'e ye!"

On the contrary, he had wooed her as a Scottish grandee, with a Scottish prince for his uncle; as, indeed, had ever been his favourite *posé* in the previous society at Naples. When Donna Eusebia, therefore, made all the discoveries in which Alice Ross and Lady Clochnabun so eagerly assisted, she was enraged, mortified, and perplexed out of all measure.

But, beyond and above all other mortifications, the terrible *décalicissement* respecting Maggie sent the proud *sangre azul*—the "blue blood" of Spain—bubbling in her excitable veins, till it nearly maddened her.

Maggie's welcomes—her attempts to be on glad familiar terms with the "bonny leddy," Donna Euseby—the laughing triumph of her white teeth, at having such a daughter-in-law to show the old miller and his wife—the caresses which she eagerly dispensed alike to her "lad" and his bride—the uproarious spirits she was in—loving him as she did in her own wild way—and rejoicing, with a mother's rejoicing, at his return to Torrieburn so brilliantly accompanied, and at the thoughts of their all dwelling together in that house,—where, since Mr. Heaton's departure and subsequent death, Maggie had resided in a loneliness extremely opposite to her tastes—her kisses, her "brewed" possets, her active walks, her homely ways, her mock dignity and "uppihness" to Gertrude, her state of alienation from the visiting society of the neighbourhood,—all these things drove Donna Eusebia to desperation. They were not merely thorns in her path; they were so many poinard thrusts in her heart. She repulsed Maggie with all the energy of scorn. And Maggie repulsed, was worse than Maggie happy! Sobs and tears, exclamations and explanations, were forced on Kenneth. She wanted to know—she insisted on her right to know—"what had come ow'r Donna Euseby," who had seemed so friendly and affectionate when first they met at Glenrosie. She claimed a daughter's duty—a son's duty—proper

respect and attention as the "head o' the hoose." She cried, she stormed, she upbraided, appealed: till at last Kenneth,—ever-selfish Kenneth—urged beyond his power of bearing—tired, and passionately told her that, if anybody was "head of the house," Donna Eusebia was that head. That the house at Torrieburn, and Torrieburn itself, was *his*,—Kenneth's; not his mother's. That she must contrive to please and satisfy and succumb to Donna Eusebia, or "things would never do." That he was already over head and ears in debt; and, *but for her*, he would be glad to "let" Torrieburn and its fishings and moor, and was certain he could "make a good thing of it." That her father really paid a ridiculous nominal sort of rent for the mills by the Falls of Torrieburn, and in reality profited by the relationship more than was at all fair, but that having been *his* father's arrangement, he, Kenneth, was "loath and reluctant" (that was all; it was not impossible, but he was loath and reluctant) to make any change, or "let the mills to any other miller!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TEARS OF EUSEBIA.

CONSIDERING that the miller was in fact his grandfather by the mother's side, it was perhaps not to be wondered at that Maggie took these hurried sentences from her "ain lad" with a mixture of amazement and indignation difficult to describe.

Bursting out into that yowling and howling in which her bitterest sorrows were always expressed; calling alternately and confusedly on her first husband, as his father and her "ain mon" and dear luvie of luvies,—and on her second husband as Kenneth's teacher and trainer, and above all, her protector, "wha woud just hae stared his twa een oot gin he had heard siccan talk as she had heard that day frae her ain bairn, that she had reared and ay baird to," she filled the house with her lamenting. Then, as Kenneth left her with a passionate oath, she burst into the newly-decorated drawing-room,—where the "she-grandee" was practising on the new piano some of those *modinhas* and *boleros* which fascinated all who heard them,—and treated that flashing beauty to a tirade in Scotch, of which Donna Eusebia understood little except that she was called a "weird woman" and a "fause witch," and accused of stealing Kenneth's heart and poisoning his "varry blade," so that he had come to defy and flout the mother that bore him.

To all which Eusebia indeed attempted some sort of reparte in her broken English, but, not succeeding to her satisfaction, awaited the return of her husband (who had escaped the after part of the family storm by going out), and, flinging herself on the bosom of his velvet shooting-coat, gave vent to tears and spasmodic grievings to the full as vehement as Maggie's, only infinitely more graceful.

That she should die — that she could bear it no longer; — that she wished she had slept under the waters of the Guadalquivir, the Darro, or the Xenil — before she left her own country for Scotland; that she would go back to her father; write and complain to her brother; sleep in the same grave with her mother; stab herself, and then throw herself into the Lake of Glenrossie; go away in the night, and never be found by Kenneth again; that she no longer loved him, and wondered at her own past infatuation; that she still adored him, and could bear for his sake anything — anything but this! All these contradictory declarations did Donna Eusebia rapidly enunciate; her little arms clasping and unclasping Kenneth; now bending his head forcibly down to meet her despairing eyes, their black lashes fringed with silver-dropping tears — now strenuously repulsing his answering embrace with wild negative shakes of her glossy head, — now clinging to him faintly, as if she would swoon away, and lose all hold of him and life at once, from sheer fatigue of such exhausting sorrow; now suddenly standing erect and beautiful, stamping those tiny feet, and raising those lustrous eyes in appeal to a justly avenging Heaven, or visionary recognition of her family ties in Spain! And then sinking once more, dissolved in weary tears, sobbing, with her face hidden in the sofa pillows; only one little smooth ivory shoulder convulsively flapping on those cushions of down, like the broken wing of a bird half murdered by some unskilled sportsman, that had just found strength to flutter back to its nest, shiver there, and so die!

Donna Eusebia knew the value of her tears! They had stood her in good stead with wiser and tenderer men than Kenneth. Many a golden hour of triumph had she bought with that silver change. And if Kenneth was not very tender, at least he was still "very much in love;" and at all events, and above all things, he hated "a scene." Like Henry Taylor's shallow-hearted hero in "Van Artevelde" —

He granted her to laugh, for so could he, — But when she wept why should it be?"

Why, indeed? What the deuce did his mother mean by making things so uncomfortable, when he had been years wandering about, and ought to be so glad to see him? What if it was in her not to see that Eusebia could not, and ought not, to put up with anything of the sort? Bad enough to have to bring her to Torrieburn, and get her gradually accustomed to the contrast which he privately felt must institute between the real and the unreal of his boastings, without additional worry of this sort! He couldn't stand it. It made him nervous; it made him ill. He believed the old miller was at the bottom of it all, for the old fellow actually had the impudence to offend because Kenneth did not greet him with the familiarity he had ventured upon while he was still a mere boy; and had even "spoken

out" about his family grievances, and with the pithy saying, "Ye'll no blot bygones; yere mither's yere mither, ye ken" — endeavoured to rebuke his conduct as unfilial!

His mother might be his mother: he couldn't help that: and, indeed he remembered no other parent: but, all the same, he had that in common with even better offspring of irregular ties (from Hotspur downwards), that he inclined to reckon only his more creditable progenitor. He was Kenneth Ross's son, and Sir Douglas Ross's nephew; but deuce a bit would he consent to be grandson to the drunken old miller, Peter Carmichael, and Betty Carmichael, his spouse.

So the stormy scene ended by his kissing away Donna Eusebia's tears. She was to be a good, patient darling, his jewel, his "alhaya," and keep her promise not to have any more scenes with his mother; and she was to go and pay a second visit to Glenrossie, and then have a beautiful house in London, and then, if she liked it, they would winter in Spain.

A beautiful house in London.

Certainly something must be done about expenses, and something more must be got out of Torrieburn!

After all, what was the use of foregoing one's rights out of sentimentality?

So Kenneth went straight from Eusebia and her cushions to his mother; who had likewise prepared things to say to him, but was cut short with that prayer of the passionate that stands in lieu of a command —

"Now do, for God's sake, my dear mother, keep yourself quiet, and listen to me!"

And then and there this son of one parent explained that Eusebia was not to be contradicted in one jot or tittle of her will; no, not even if her wishes seemed whims in the eyes of "other persons." He did not intend her to stay much longer at Torrieburn; there was too much wood and water about the place, and Eusebia's health might suffer. He should cut a good deal of the woods down, and make some other alterations. Meanwhile he hoped there would be no more "rows," for he hated them, and it was vulgar. Eusebia had been used to the very first society, and, of course, felt the assumption of equality to be unfair. She must be treated with the utmost deference and respect by his mother.

And when outraged Maggie once more attempted an irresistible burst about "his ain dede father," and gude Mr. Heaton" (she had never called Mr. Heaton by his Christian name), Kenneth broke in with equal impetuosity, — "pooh! bosh! Heaton was a milkop, and fit for nothing but to read prayers and teach Latin to children; and, as to my father, it is not my fault that he arranged matters so — so awkwardly; we must do the best we can under the circumstances: it is a good deal harder upon me than it is upon you. Now, let there be an end of it; for I am sure I do not wish to vex you more than I can help."

"Ou Kenneth!" was all the reply from the

widowed Mrs. Heaton, as she flung her smart silk apron over her head preparatory to a long burst of hysterical weeping.

And, while she sat weeping at home, Kenneth strode over to the Falls, and stepped into the house of his miller grandfather, whom he addressed with extreme haughtiness, and called "Carmichael." He informed the old man that he was "about to make some changes," indeed, "necessitated to make" some changes; that nothing would be done in a hurry, or without consideration, but that eventually — *eventually* — the mill would probably be let to a younger tenant, and some new machinery tried there.

To all which the old man listened in dogged silence, without rising from his settle by the peat fire; only, when Kenneth had apparently got through all he intended to say, his disowned grandfather looked up with a keen repelling glance, and said, sarcastically, — "I'm thinking, it ye ca' me 'Carmichael' noo' the beard's on yere chin, ye might put the '*Mister*' till it."

His wife nudged his elbow, as Kenneth nodded rather sulkily to her and went out.

"Ou, man; dinna ye anger him," whispered the old woman. "Sicna a deevil's bairn as that might send our Maggie packing, and not think twice on't."

And they watched the handsome young proprietor of Torrieburn, as, with the strong quick step of youth, he made his way homeward, until he turned the angle of the bridge where his father had met his death, and passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. FRERE IN A NEW LIGHT.

"Oh! Douglas, I was just coming to you," said Gertrude, one morning soon after these discussions, as he entered her sitting-room; "Kenneth has written me rather an odd note proposing to come here again for a while, till his wife and his poor mother learn to get on a little better together. And Lorimer has written me a still odder epistle about Mr. Frere."

Sir Douglas looked thoughtful.

"Gertrude, you must know what all that means, about 'getting on better' together. I love Kenneth; yes, I love him as a son; but I cannot shut my eyes to his carelessness about his unfortunate mother; and I am not over anxious that Donna Eusebia should be always with you. I have often wondered you took so heartily to her! You are very different."

Gertrude laughed. "Perhaps that is the very reason: they say people always love their contrasts. I confess I think Eusebia the most charming person I ever met. So beautiful, so accomplished, so winning, so warm!"

And, speaking the last words, Gertrude paused and coloured, for she was conscious in her heart that she was contrasting Eusebia with Alice! Alice, whom she had been requested to "pet;" whom she *had* petted; and yet in

whose stealthy pace there was no eagerness, in whose cold eyes no welcome, in the touch of whose passive hand no cordiality: while Eusebia, — oh! Eusebia, how enchanting she was!

"You can ask them, my love, as a matter of course: but I would fain see both Kenneth and Eusebia show a better disposition for home. We shall have him wandering away again. He has so little settled purpose! And yet I did my best with him — I did my best."

Sir Douglas spoke in a musing absent way. He puzzled over Kenneth and his conduct at all times. The two men were so unlike, that each was incomprehensible to the other.

"Well," added he after a pause; "and Frere? What is it that our sage Lorimer writes about Frere? He was always rather inclined to find fault with that enthusiast in the missionary line. Does he grumble that we have not yet got him shipped off to New Zealand, or Otaheite?"

"Douglas, it is very serious. He writes — here is his letter — that he has every reason to think Mr. Frere is an impostor; at least that he has given an utterly false account of his antecedents. That he would not have troubled himself about the matter; but that Giuseppe, immediately on arriving in Naples, came to him, and told him certain facts which, coupled with Lorimer's own previous impression that Mr. Frere was not altogether unknown to him, convinced him that you ought to sift the matter, and endeavour to get from Frere a distinct account of the past. It is really rather curious, if you come to consider, how little that is positive we do know about him. He has never been to see the friends he originally stated were so anxious to receive him. He seems to communicate with no one. He has never named places or persons in the course of our many conversations on the plans for his future; I think, myself, he is a mystery."

Sir Douglas smiled. "My Gertrude growing suspicious," he said; "that is a new phase of character; and Lorimer, the cynic that he is, shall have all the credit of your conversion. I really do not see any cause for fear about Mr. James Frere. He is doing his duty strictly; somewhat illiberally, perhaps, according to my notion of religious opinions, but industriously and consistently. As to his moral character, he might vie with St. Anthony, by all I hear; and the only foible I think I have perceived in him is that very reticence of which you speak, which I do not defend, but I think I can account for it in a very simple way."

"How do you account for it, Douglas?"

"I suspect (since we are all to have our suspicions) that, well educated as he is, he is not well-born — that he comes of what are called 'low people,' and is ashamed of his extraction. He is quite willing we should know *what* he is, and he certainly is a man of remarkable ability; but he is not willing that we should know *who* he is; and I really do not see how I can press him on that point, or urge him to reveal what concerns no one here."

Gertrude hesitated — looked up at her husband — hesitated again, and then said, with a sweet shy smile —

"What if it *does* concern some one here, Douglas? Some one you are very fond of; some one whose destiny you are very anxious to guard?"

"Alice! you mean my sister Alice," he answered hurriedly, while a sudden flush passed over his brow; "I cannot think it; I think she would have told me; I am sure she would."

And a very vivid memory of the long conversation on "kith-and-kin love," held with Alice as they sat that sweet evening resting among the heather, returned to him as he spoke.

"It was Giuseppe; no very good authority, perhaps, and I daresay, poor fellow, he thinks love is the hinge on which everything in this world turns, but he assured Lorimer he considered this a case of courtship; that early in the morning, before any one is up, except the servants, they walked and sat together in the garden, and that once he came upon Alice violently weeping (Alice who never weeps), and Mr. Frere speaking to her so eagerly and angrily that he never even perceived Giuseppe's presence; and once more at night — quite at night, he saw them part at the Tower door, that leads up to her apartment, and" —

"My love, my love," said Sir Douglas very impatiently, "all that proves nothing. Frere is just the man to melt a girl to tears on religious subjects; and servants, especially foreigners, always see a Cupid in every corner, like the painted border of a valentine."

"It is Lorimer," said Gertrude, with hesitation, "who thinks you should ascertain, for Alice's sake (I have sometimes thought myself that — that she liked him), what and who Mr. Frere is."

"Ascertain — ascertain! Gertrude, I have but one way of doing things. I cannot beat about the bush, and keep patient watch over trifles, to try and bring my mind to a decision; neither can I, without cause, without the legitimate interest in Alice which you think may be involved, ask Frere a single question. But this I will do; I will learn at once, from Alice herself, whether there is a shadow of ground for your supposition; and, if there is, I will make those point-blank inquiries which dear old Lorimer thinks so easy. I should like to put him in my place; conceive bluntly addressing Frere thus: 'I understand that my nephew's courier suspects you are an impostor; I hope it is not true; account for yourself.' Set your mind at ease, Gertrude. I am certain dear Alice will tell me the truth. I am certain she will. She might keep her secret from the whole world, but she would not from me."

So saying, up went frank-hearted Sir Douglas to the turret-chamber, and knocked at the door. Alice said, "Come in," without looking up; she was very busy reading a letter. She slightly started when she saw who was her visitor, and rose directly.

Her half-brother took the little passive hand, pressed it, and sat down by her as she re-seated herself. He came directly to the object of his visit. How Lorimer had written about Mr. Frere to Gertrude, and Gertrude had thought it possible Alice might be interested in the very clever and remarkable man who had been intimate with them now for a long time; and how he, Sir Douglas himself, would not think it otherwise than natural; but that there were special reasons why he adjured Alice not to be too shy to tell him whether it was so or not. Her secret would be safe with him; but he must endeavour to follow up some inquiries respecting the stranger which Lorimer had made.

And then, in a very tender and touching manner, he referred to their compact of mutual confidence the day they talked of "kith-and-kin love," and he kissed her kindly on the forehead, and petted her as he had done that day.

And after their interview was over, he hurried back to Gertrude, and assured her that Alice smiled at the idea of such a thing as any love betwixt her and Mr. Frere: that she had held many earnest conversations with that preacher, principally about schools and foreign missions, — but never on such a subject as love except once — and that once was not in any way personal to herself; it was about another person; she would not tell Sir Douglas then; she would consider and tell him another time; these things ought not to be lightly gossiped about. It was something that seemed to give her pain. Indeed, she had admitted that it was about a near and dear friend; or one she desired to think of as a near and dear friend. It was a consultation with Mr. Frere whether she should venture to offer that friend advice; and he had controlled her in that. She would talk with Sir Douglas about it another time. It had nothing whatever to do with her own affairs.

By a strange coincidence, while they were yet speaking of Mr. Frere, a little note in pencil was handed to Sir Douglas. It said that that individual was waiting for him in the library, having received a painful summons to the bedside of his half-uncle in Shropshire, who had been crushed in the wheel of some cotton manufactory, and that to so urgent a call he could only answer by starting as soon as possible; that he could not go without wishing Sir Douglas farewell, not knowing exactly when he would return.

Both Sir Douglas and Gertrude went down to the library to bid him good-bye. He thanked them gravely for their kindness during his sojourn among them, and regretted the interruption made in his usual duties by this, the most sacred duty of all. "For," said he sadly, "I suppose no man ever was so destitute of near ties. I have relatives by my mother's side in Australia, not in very brilliant positions" — and he laughed an awkward laugh, — "one is a petty innkeeper, and the others are making their way as well as they can, sheep-tending.

There are, however, circumstances which excuse their alienation from me; and I do not like talking of myself. We are all in God's hand. No Christian is fatherless, and the great Father of all sends each of us such fate as He thinks best. I only trust, when we meet again, all may be as bright here as I leave it."

Saying which, Mr. James Frere gracefully withdrew; and Sir Douglas could not forbear the observation to his wife, how strange it was, that at the very moment they were debating as to inquiries respecting him, he had thus openly alluded to his condition!

"Rely on it, it is as I told you, love. He belongs to people of whom he feels ashamed: some gentleman's natural son perhaps. It is a weakness, but what a common weakness! I am glad, at least, that it should be no vexation to Ailie. Her innocent talk on the subject quite set me at my ease. And now I am going to Torrieburn, to talk matters over with Kenneth, who has got the freak into his head of cutting down the woods, and will spoil his place. We shall be very busy all day."

"We may meet, for I promised to take Eusebia some plants she wants, and a pair of pruning scissors. We shall think our business nearly as important as yours; we are both so fond of flowers."

As Gertrude left the hall door, she brushed against flitting Alice, who, in her usual cat-like way, was gliding down the walk. Lady Ross smiled and nodded, but passed on. She never expected Alice now to join her, as she did in former inexperienced days.

She had proceeded but a little way, when she found she had forgotten the pruning scissors; they were left in the conservatory.

She set down the little basket of plants, and returned swiftly to seek for them. Eusebia had made such a point of having these scissors to snip dead leaves and straggling roses!

She passed to the further end of the conservatory. There was no way out without returning. Suddenly the voice of Alice, in distress and complaining, smote on her amazed ear.

"Oh, James!" it said, "how shall I ever bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Then Mr. Frere's melodious voice answered, with something between a sneer and a sigh—"You must bear it as other women have done, I suppose. You must not be like the poor old soul who, when led to the gallows, said she knew she never could bear to be hung."

"Oh! James—James Frere, do not jest with me! what shall I do when you have forsaken me!"

"I do not forsake you. You must make some excuse for a visit to Edinburgh. I will see you there. You are your own mistress, and not a child. Be prudent; this is temporary; I have got through a hundred worse chances! It is lucky you have a key to the letter bag. Don't attempt to write to me till you hear. Perhaps I shall only communicate by advertisement, with a single initial Good-bye!"

"Oh, James!"

"Do not weep; be as usual; you must not be by any imprudence. Do you think I am not sorry for you—sorry to leave you? It is pleasant to be hunted over the earth as I am?"

Then Alice—quiet cat-like Alice—with a suppressed cry, threw herself into the arms of the would-be missionary preacher, who, fervently straining her to his breast, muttered the holy words, "Curse the fool who has perished!" and then, putting her from him, and looking steadily in her face with his wild big eyes, "You are no mate for me!" said, "if you can't bear the gnawing of anxiety as the Spartan bore the gnawing of the fox. I ever you feel tempted to give way, say to yourself, 'I may hang him!'" And having spoken every one of these sentences as rapidly as breath could utter them, he disappeared from the conservatory, and in a minute more the scolding wheels, down the approach to the castle, that Mr. Frere was gone.

With a deep shivering sigh, and pressing her hand on her side as if she really felt the pricking pain so recently alluded to, Alice stood out of the conservatory; and was present in the garden again, looking out with wide eyes—at nothing!

And all this time, and for some seconds afterwards, Gertrude stood spell-bound as a statue—the pruning scissors in her hand, and blood beating at her ears, as it beats in moments of intense anxiety and expectation, or of terror.

Was it a waking dream? Was that the fervent orator, the condemner of sin in all shapes, the guide and pastor of the young, intrusted to him?

As Gertrude passed on her way to Torrieburn, she saw outlawed little Jamie Michael sitting on the top of the low stone, his favourite resort; he watched the other children swinging their slates and samaras at school; but he could not go to school himself, "because, ye ken, he brak the Lord's day."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CLOUDS.

ANOTHER secret, then, was to burden Gertrude's mind! What could she do? What ought she to do? If pussy-cat Alice had been one grain more genial and confiding, she would at least have endeavoured to draw from her an explanation of that strange painful scene with Mr. Frere, and advised, — if advice could be of any service.

That there was some entanglement; some betrothal; and that they themselves knew it to be imprudent, unwelcome to those to whom Alice might naturally be expected to confide it; that Mr. Frere was not what he had represented himself to be: all that was very evident. But not so evident what should be done in consequence of the discovery. If Gertrude had concealed from Sir Douglas the faulty conduct of his nephew, how could she feel justified in setting him against his more helpless sister? What if she caused some great quarrel between them? What if by revealing too soon a secret that Alice might one day herself confide, she made Sir Douglas's half-sister miserable for life? Yet if there was any meaning at all in Mr. Frere's parting sentences, they meant that he was unworthy of her; that he had done something which, *if known*, — whether the accusation were true or false, would be his ruin.

Oh! if Lorimer, the wise counsellor, the steady friend, the experienced mind, were but within hail, and she could consult him! She would not harm Alice; but at least she would learn what it was he had heard against Mr. James Frere. And while Gertrude was thus cogitating in her own simpler way, Alice was also deep in thought in the tower-room. Her obvious depression, her paleness, her starts when suddenly addressed, her wistful watches, in one generally so self-possessed, struck not only Gertrude, who thought she knew the cause, but Sir Douglas, who did *not* know the cause. And up to the tower-room, as he had come many a morning since their talking of kith and kin love, came that pitying heart, and, winding his arm round his half-sister's waist, told her in very plain words that he feared she was suffering; was sorry for Frere's departure; was ill; was uncomfortable; or that something had occurred between her and others that had vexed her.

Then, with a little shrinking from the encircling arm, Alice declared that nothing vexed her; that nothing had occurred be-

tween her and others; *not even between her and Lady Ross*, if that was what Douglas meant, — and she turned her eyes on him with well-acted shy questioning. Only she felt a little uncomfortable — a little embarrassed — now that Kenneth was again in the house; and old Lady Clochnaben pained her, and plagued her about those old stories — Sir Douglas knew what they were. And as he listened with grave attention, and such utter unconsciousness of her meaning as convinced her that innuendoes would never reach his understanding, Alice at length bravely spoke out, and saw the soldier's cheek slightly blanch as he heard her, without making any observation, steadily gaze from the turret window across the distant hills beyond which frowned rocky Clochnaben.

For, — creeping, and soft, and tortuous as were the words in which Alice conveyed her meaning, and quietly as her little claws alternately sheathed themselves in velvet, and extended themselves for a sharp grip of the heart with which she was playing, — she left with Sir Douglas the distinct and uneradicable impression that there had been no delirium in what Kenneth had spoken, in that one respect of his love for Gertrude. That he had certainly proposed for her; that her mother knew it; that all Naples expected it; that every one had known it — but himself.

And then, with timid hesitation, Alice further explained that she had alluded to something of the sort when she told Sir Douglas her more intimate conversations with Mr. Frere had been about "another person," not about herself; that consultations had taken place with him whether she should venture on advising a near and dear friend (by which name she ventured to designate Lady Ross), because James Frere was very earnest and unindulgent, and a good deal scandalized at Kenneth's impertinent manner to Sir Douglas's wife. It was the manner of a young vain man who conceived that he had been unfairly used (Mr. Frere thought); and he ought to be checked; and Lady Ross did not check him. On the night of the family gathering, — that great dinner, — Kenneth had behaved very ill; he had spoken very insolently, while Sir Douglas was talking to Major Forbes in a different part of the room; had even made use of the expression to Lady Ross — "You think, because I was once so fond of you that you could have twisted me round your finger, that you're to govern me all my life" — and Mr. Frere was excessively shocked; the rather that Monzie's

Craigievar was standing by, and must also have heard it. And the same night Kenneth had quarrelled with Donna Eusebia; Lady Charlotte had been quite frightened by his violence; and Mr. Frere had hoped then that Lady Ross would have appealed to Sir Douglas to lecture the young man; but it seemed all was passed over very quietly. Mr. Frere had said also he was sure it was a marriage that could not end happily between Kenneth and the Spanish coquette; he had been very severe, and she, Alice, had since felt uncomfortable, she could hardly tell why, but she thought it was from knowing all that was said by Mr. Frere, and her half-brother knowing nothing of it; and she was sure she would be more cheerful and at her ease, now she had unburdened her heart, for she had never had any secrets to keep from any one (living so much alone), and it quite weighed upon her spirits the things Mr. Frere had said; and that old Lady Clochnaben, and even Lord Clochnaben,—who usually took so little interest in what passed,—had said against Kenneth. For of course Lady Ross could not help Kenneth being impertinent to her; and no one who knew the dear half-brother,—the soldier-hero that Alice was so proud to belong to,—could wonder that after knowing him she thought no more of Kenneth: but people's talk was irritating nevertheless; and Mr. Frere had wished Alice to keep utter silence about it, and she never would have spoken of it but for Douglas's questioning her. She would not deceive him by any but the real answer to his inquiries.

From the turret chamber, stately Sir Douglas went with rather slower step than usual to the bright morning room of his wife. She was there, playing with her little boy. It was a beautiful picture. Her arms were supporting the merry robust child as he leaned back in them, catching at the long braids of her hair with both hands.

"Your hair is the longest, mamma, of us two; but mine is the curliest! curly, curly, curly, like cousin Kennet's."

"Curly like papa's?"

"No! 'cause papa's got white hairs in his, and I have no white hairs; curly like Kennet's," persisted the child.

"Well, curly like Kennet's: and now I am going to pull it all straight and flat like mine."

"No, no!"

And into the presence of the romping child and his laughing mother came the father and husband.

He kissed the boy fondly, and set him down again, walked to the window irresolutely, and returned. Then he said to his wife, "Gertrude, why did you never tell me Kenneth had proposed for you?"

The startled blood crimsoned in her cheek; and for a moment she did not reply. Then she answered in a low voice, "There were circumstances I thought might vex you."

"No circumstance could vex me like your appearing not to have perfect confidence in me. Was it before I came to Naples?"

"No. It was the very day you asked me to be your wife; almost immediately after you were gone from the Villa Mandorlo."

"Good God! And you never discouraged his attachment? He must have fancied himself very secure of a favourable answer."

The hot colour deepened in Gertrude's cheek. Something almost imperious and scornful was in her tone as she replied: "I never saw anything in Kenneth that led me to imagine he was attached to me. I could not, therefore, either encourage or discourage him. Who has been talking of these matters to you, dear Douglas?"

"Is it true that he quarrelled with Eusebia the night of the dinner-party here?" said Sir Douglas, without answering her question.

"Yes. I believe it is true they had a great quarrel. It seemed to pass off more easily than I should have thought possible. They both came to breakfast next day as if nothing had occurred."

"And you never told me!"

"Douglas"—said Gertrude, earnestly,— "do not vex yourself and me, because I have tried to avoid giving you vexations."

Sir Douglas sighed.

"I cannot bear to think that there should be reserve on any point between us. There should be none! Man and wife are one."

"My own dear husband, there shall be none. At this very time I have been debating in my mind whether to tell you of a thing, about——"

"About Kenneth?"

"Oh! no. It is about Mr. Frere and Alice."

"Gertrude," said Sir Douglas, impatiently,— "you have a prejudice against Mr. Frere, because he found fault, and cavilled at matters which—which I dare say you could not control, but which are painful to me. I would rather we did not speak of him. Alice has told me——"

"She has told you!"

"Yes; she has satisfied my mind as to

the terms they were upon and the conversation they held. You were quite mistaken as to their purport. I repeat that it is painful to me to allude to what Frere said: — I only hope — Oh! forgive me, forgive me, Gertrude! I am speaking as if I doubted you!"

The sudden change of tone — the mingled pain and tenderness of his manner — thrilled the heart of his wife. She wound her arms round him, and, looking up passionately in his face, she said — "I do not know what it is that has so disturbed you, but never come doubt between us two, I pray God!"

Then, after a pause, she added, — "Do not let us talk of Kenneth. Be satisfied that, even if it was a mistake, it was no thought of self, but of you, — you only, — that prompted me to keep silence formerly about him. He is now happily married: to a most beautiful and fascinating woman. Leave them to their happiness — and let them stand outside the gate of ours!"

As she spoke she smiled — that lovely smile whose sunshine irradiated his days; and beckoning the boy again from his playthings, she set him on his father's knee. Then folding her arms round both, — "This is *your* share of love in life," she said; "be content, Douglas, and do not think of other people's loves and likings."

And so there was peace, but still a cloud. Sir Douglas thought of Frere's prophecy, that the marriage of Kenneth and the "Spanish coquette" could not turn out well; and Gertrude, through all her deep and earnest love, felt the mystery of injustice in the sentence which had accused her of having a prejudice against Frere. How Alice had come to talk of Kenneth (for she never doubted it was Alice) she could not conjecture; and how she could have "satisfied" Sir Douglas after the speeches Gertrude had heard from Frere's lips, was yet more inexplicable.

She imagined a very different explanation from that which had really taken place. She supposed a tearful declaration of interest in that faulty lover, instead of a bitter and perfidious vengeance for his loss.

Ay! bitter. For Alice considered that, but for Lorimer's letter and Gertrude's comments on it to Sir Douglas, James Frere might still be at her side; filling her hitherto cold and lonely existence with *her* share of love, late come, but to which, — now it *had* come, — she held with a wild and clinging attachment. Her love was like a man's love: a vehement and headstrong fancy. It had neither the patient tenderness nor

the innocent trustfulness of woman's heart. He was gone forth; gone forth from *her*, — even she scarce knew where, or for how long, — but gone — gone out into the temptation of pleasing and 'being pleased elsewhere; and when Alice thought of it, that pale and apparently passionless woman could have dashed her head against the stone embrasure of her turret-window, or thrown herself from it into the deep courtyard below; anything to still the fierce beating of blood to and fro in her brain, and deaden the thoughts that chased each other there, of the dark-eyed, meagre, eloquent man, who had been mocking heaven and his fellow-creatures by the assumption of a character as much acted as any on the stage!

But Alice governed herself, and was outwardly calm. The fox of an evil secret gnawing at her heart should not find her less brave than the Spartan. If she gave way she might destroy him, — she might *hang* him, — those were his words: no matter what they meant: no matter what he was. She would bear, — and live, — and see him again; and rend in pieces any one who attempted to thwart her, to rival her in his affections.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MYSTERY OF EVIL.

AND when Sir Douglas and Lady Ross, and Donna Eusebia and Kenneth, were all moving from Glenrossie for a season in town, and were to spend three nights in Edinburgh, to show that strange and memorable city to the Spanish bride, Alice altered her usual course of bidding her half-brother farewell on the steps of the great portal, and returning to her lone turret chamber, and told him she would accompany the party as far as Edinburgh, and even stay there a few days after they were gone, with an old friend of her mother's.

"Indeed!" she said in her slow way, with her odd smile; "it's just one of my silly entertainments to see how Donna Eusebia takes new sights; and besides, I'm getting so spoilt by Douglas, that I believe some day I'll follow every foot of the way to London, instead of stopping here."

"I wish you would, Alice," said he, eagerly; "it would do you good."

"Oh! I'd be lost in your great crowd of people; I'm too simple a body for any very grand or stirring life. Except war," she added after a little pause. "I often think I

should like to see a war. I'd like to live in a tent for one campaign, and see the soldier life I've dreamed of so often."

And she looked up at Sir Douglass.

The sights of Edinburgh would have made more impression on the Spanish Donna if she had had the remotest inkling of the great facts in history, or known any of the associations which alone can make sight-seeing pleasant. She was not at all afraid of Sir Douglas, but she was a little bored and oppressed by his eager endeavour to impress upon her explanations to which she was perfectly indifferent. In her opinion the principal sight in Edinburgh, for the time being, was Kenneth's foreign bride. She was the sort of woman who liked to be thought beautiful, even by the waiters who brought in luncheon at the hotel, or the doctor who came to advise about the family health. She was also the sort of woman who set down to her own beauty all notice, even the notice that in some measure was the result of other circumstances. A certain peculiarity of dress, of walk, of side-long flashing glances, would have prevented Donna Eusebia from passing along unnoticed, had she been far less handsome than she undoubtedly was; but in her own opinion that notice resulted from the obvious fact that nothing so lovely had ever before passed along Princes Street, or looked from Calton Hill. She could hardly bear to accept the offer of Sir Douglas's field-glass to assist her vision, for fear some chance passer-by might miss the sight of her own bright yet languid eyes, finding that foolish telescopic block an obstacle to his admiration. She also panted to get from Edinburgh to London, that great arena of conquest, where gaieties, and balls, and operas would give back her natural opportunities of enjoying life, and leave her little satin clad feet in peace, unmolested by proposals to take a stroll in glens where the birch-tree shivered, or over the rough heather of unwelcome hills.

It was the last of the three days consecrated to their inspection of modern Athens; Sir Douglas's eagerness had waned in the atmosphere of indifference wherein his communications on all subjects seem to fade and dissolve; and the group of relatives were rather silently taking their final saunter home, when little Niel, Sir Douglas's son, caused the foremost of the party to look round by a loud "*don't*, Aunt Alice!" spoken with childlike impetuosity and anger.

"Neil, Neil! oh, fie, what a voice!" said Gertrude, as with a tender smile, but a

warning gesture of her hand, she turned to the boy.

"It is Aunt Alice's fault," said he; "She gave me such a shake, such a nasty rude shake to my shoulder, only because I said there was a blind pedlar following us, and he oughtn't to follow us."

"I didn't think it kind," said Alice, quietly; "you shouldn't be unkind to the poor; besides, he wasn't a beggar; he only wanted to sell me some Scotch pearls and stones of various sorts."

"Oh, let me buy; let me see these pearls of your country; are they of great cost? Kenneth, some pearls, will you?"

The pedlar had retreated some few steps, but, Eusebia went eagerly up to him, and remained chaffering awhile as to prices, in her pretty broken English. Kenneth stood smiling at her, occasionally puffing at his cigar. Sir Douglas and Gertrude were still occupied with a tender little lecture to the new bud of the passionate race, who flushed, beautiful, and only half-convinced, was looking up in his mother's face for its usual store of pardons.

Sir Douglas looked away to the group beyond; he spoke, with a smile, to Alice.

"Eusebia has got her pearls in the palm of that avaricious little hand, and we are rid of the pedlar. He has made a good bargain, I am certain; look with what an air he saunters off. More like King Jamie's 'gaberlunzie man' than a common beggar."

For one instant Alice's eye fixed on Sir Douglas with that closed glitter of scrutiny which made them so like a cat's. As she lifted them she met Gertrude's glance, and shrank from it. At that moment the pedlar dropped one of the cases he had been showing, and was proceeding apparently unconscious of the loss, when Alice and Gertrude simultaneously moved forward to restore it to him. Alice was nearest. She hastily picked up the case and handed it to the man. As she did so, Gertrude heard her distinctly utter the words, "To-night, at ten: I am not afraid."

That evening Gertrude could not help watching Alice. She was quiet as usual. Once or twice she alluded to the journey the others were to make the next day, and the necessity of rest for all. She herself felt fatigued, she said, though she had not done much. As the clock neared the hour of ten, she rose and bade good-night, and glided away.

Gertrude's heart beat hard; she felt anxious and irresolute. That tension of the sense of hearing came to her which comes to us all at such times. She rose, and crossed

the room to the open window for air; as she did so she heard the rustle of a silk dress passing the door. She sat down by the window, and leaned out. Stealthy and swift, in an instant, from the hotel door to the corner of the street immediately under the window, came feline Alice. The 'gaberlanzie man' was there. He spoke one rapid sentence, and pointed in a certain direction. Alice crossed the street and got into one of the carriages that ply for hire; and when Gertrude's eyes returned from following her to where the pedlar had stood, he was gone!

She sat like one in a dream. The clustering lights, low and high, that make the opposite side of the strangely cleft city of Edinburgh look like a dark bank covered with scattered stars, seemed to tremble and waver with an odd life of their own. The soft moon rising beyond the tumult and stir — beyond the grim old castle — beyond the woe, the want, and the wickedness of earth, taking her soundless path through the blue ether, and illuminating the clouds as she passed; the murmur of voices, the roll of wheels, the patter of footsteps, the occasional break of so-called "street music," torturing the ear with a vague caricature of some well-known melody — all these things — things visible or things audible — seemed to reach Gertrude's senses through a thick dull medium; that wall of thought that shuts out minor impressions from the inner brain.

Sir Douglas touched her gently on the shoulder: "My love," he said, "if you could only see how tired your face looks you would follow Alice's example and go to bed."

As Lady Ross passed to her room she looked into that where Alice should have been. All was still and empty. The moon shone on the white unruffled quilt. No one was sleeping there.

And no one entered there while Gertrude's weary eyes still waited for the sleep that would not close them, for long, long hours, till at day-dawn an irresistible impulse urged her once more to visit that blank place: all was as it had been the night before! Over the smooth quilt where the moonbeams had then shone the sunrise was now stealing; but no one was sleeping there! Had Alice eloped?

No! Alice reappeared in the morning as if indeed all had been a dream. She passed Lady Ross on the staircase, coming up as the latter went down. She spoke in her usual slow, calm tone.

"Is it not a little early for breakfast?" she said; "but I will be with you directly.

I have been down to the sitting-room to get my bonnet and gloves, which I left there last night."

And when the chambermaid of the hotel came into Alice's room, at the hour she had been desired to come, no difference could have been perceived between the condition of that and any other of the sleeping-rooms occupied by the party. The pillow was fairly indented, and the covering duly ruffled, and the towels tossed here and there, and the pretty embroidered slippers kicked irregularly under a chair. All looked as if, instead of swiftly passing up, first to the sitting-room and then to her own, as soon as the hotel was open and while few busy servants were about, the "lady in No. 62" had risen and dressed for breakfast like her neighbours.

Yet Alice had only taken seven minutes and a half to make all these picturesque arrangements!

And Sir Douglas, when they parted, embraced her very tenderly, and hoped to see her stronger and better when he returned in the autumn to Glenrosie. But Gertrude shrank more than ever from her alien sister-in-law. Even supposing her to have rashly married James Frere, and to be irrevocably entangled in the meshes of his destiny, what consummate self-possession and hypocrisy had she not displayed the night of that mysterious interview! Either the pretended pedlar was James Frere himself, or a messenger from that evil man. His height, his air, and something in his step when walking away, favoured the supposition in Gertrude's mind that it was himself; and as to disguise, he that was so clever in all things might well be supposed able to contrive one that should baffle the very keenest observation.

CHAPTER XL.

THE COURSE OF EVENTS.

IF ever that Tantalus thirst, the love of admiration, *could* be satisfied, certainly it should have been in the exceptional case of Donna Eusebia's triumphal progress through the London season. She "made *furor*," as the foreign phrase terms it. A hundred *lorgnons* were aimed at her sparkling face as she leaned from her opera-box; her graceful arm half nestled in scarlet and gold shawls, and Moorish bournouses of white and gold, black and gold, purple and gold, as the fancy of the evening moved her; for

Eusebia had as many shawls and gowns as our vestal and over-rated Queen Elizabeth.

She laid her dresses and wreaths out in the morning on her bed, and studied what the evening should bring forth. She tried on her jewels at the glass, and rehearsed the performances of her *coiffeur*. She tossed a white blonde mantilla over her glossy head, and stuck orange-blossoms under the comb, and tossed it off again, to replace it with heavy black lace and a yellow rose. She sat mute and motionless, contemplating her own little satin shoes with big rosettes to them, and then springing up and assaulted that bewitching *chaussure*; pulling off the rosettes, and putting in glittering buckles; relapsing thereafter into the mute idolatry of contemplation. She wore her jet black hair one day so smoothly braided that her head looked as if carved in black marble, and the next it was all loose and wayward and straying about, as if she had been woke out of a restless slumber, and carried off to a party without having time allowed her to comb it through. All the London dandies, — half the grave politicians, — a quarter of the philosophic sages, — and a very large proportion of the Established Church, both high and low, — thought, spoke, and occupied themselves chiefly with the fact of the appearance of this Star of Granada. The pine-apples and flowers of every great country house, and the time of the masters of such houses, were at her entire disposal. It was rather a favour conferred than received, when she consented to accept a peer's ticket for some state show, or the opening ceremonies of Parliament. Statesmen sat round her after the cabinet was over, and indeed in some cases were even suspected of hurrying the happy moment of their release from such duties, in order to be in time to ride with her in the Park. Bishops wrote her facetious and kindly little notes. Poets extolled her charms in every measure possible in the English language, including the doubtful possibility of hexameters. Beautiful fresh young girls were presented at Court and made their *début* in the world of fashion, and the greatest compliment that could be paid to the mothers of such as were brunettes was to say that "about the eyes," or "cheek," or "chin," or "mouth," or *tout ensemble*, they had a look of Donna Eusebia. It was thought the most monstrous reply that ever was made, when handsome Mrs. Cregan, Lorimer Boyd's old friend, said, with a saucy smile at the supposed resemblance to her young daughter, "God forbid!

I had rather my girl were ugly, which she is not."

The only person who approved this speech was poor Lady Charlotte, who was at once puzzled and outraged at the way in which "the Spanish she-grandee" threw her daughter, Lady Ross, into the shade. She fretted over it: she even cried over it; and was only moderately consoled by the argument of the victim herself, who repeated gently, "But you know, my little mother, it is the brilliant people who are admired in the world, and I never was brilliant. As long as Douglas thinks me beautiful, I do not care if the whole world thought me so plain that they were forced to turn their heads another way to avoid seeing me as I passed by. Do not let us grudge Eusebia her triumphs; she really is so beautiful, and her singing is so wonderful, and she is altogether so unlike anything one ever saw before!"

To which insufficient comforting Lady Charlotte was wont to reply, as she dolefully pulled the long ringlet, "Yes, my dear Gertie, I know all that, but she isn't *real* — and I like things that are real. You are all real, you know; and you don't make nasty little sticky curls with gum and sugar, and plaster them down on your cheek, nor try your things on all day before a looking-glass, nor spend all Sir Douglas's money in getting new jewels. However Kenneth can afford it, I'm sure I don't know! That butterfly of diamonds she had on her forehead last night cost seven hundred and forty pounds. I know it did, because I saw it, and wanted it the day I went to Court, only I was too sensible to buy it; and now *she* has got it, with its beautiful long trembling horns, and wings that lift up and down; and you had nothing on but that necklace of Scotch pearls! I can't bear it — I can't!" And a little whimpering cry was stifled in Lady Charlotte's embroidered handkerchief, as in days when she wept for Zizine.

And Gertrude smiled, and kissed the faded little woman, and repeated for the hundredth time how dear to her was that necklace of Scotch pearls, Douglas's gift; and how *he* thought it became her more than any ornament she had — except, indeed, the turquoise chain which was her mother's own wedding-gift.

To which Lady Charlotte mournfully replied, that she "knew all that was said to comfort her," but that it really was enough to break one's heart to see how Eusebia was spoilt and run after. "And you are

so foolish, Gertie, I must say, though I don't mean that you ain't clever in some things; and, indeed, if you sang like that I shouldn't at all like it, though *that* is thought very clever, it seems! But you are foolish in one way: always talking of Sir Douglas as if he were the only man in the world. Now there are hundreds quite as good judges as he, and they are all running after Eusebia, which is what provokes me so, I don't know what to do. But I can tell you, my dear, that it don't do to think *only* of what one man thinks, though I hope, of course, you will always be a good wife, and I am sure you will; and your dear father and I never had a word in our lives. But still, depend upon it, a man always admires you more if ever so many more men admire you, because my experience tells me *that*, and the fact is, Donna Eusebia *tries* to be admired, and you don't; and she gets all the men to make a fuss about her: and it is very wrong, and very provoking, and quite frets me down. And, also, I can't see what right she has to be staying here, making conquests of everybody in your house, and making you really — somehow — *second* in this house! Why can't she and Kenneth go away and live by themselves?"

This last question was, indeed, more pertinent and to the purpose than the usual maunderings of the owner of lost Zizine. Kenneth had been "by way of" coming to stay with Sir Douglas till he found a suitable house in town. But week after week rolled away, and the houses proposed to him were either too small, too shabby, in too unfashionable a locality or too dear — the latter reason being the preponderating one, for nothing would persuade Kenneth that he was not to find a sort of palace, and pay for it as a common bachelor lodging.

Meanwhile he felt no more scruple as to his dependence on his uncle's hospitality than he had felt all his life in such matters. Donna Eusebia never gave it a thought. And Old Sir Douglas, struggling to be just, to be indulgent, and somewhat repentant of a secret revulsion of feeling at the time Alice confided her false confidences to him about her conversations with Mr. Frere and his Scotch neighbours, took little Neil to sleep in his own dressing-room, that the sleeping-nursery might be given to Eusebia's French maid (for even a handsome house in London will not lodge double its expected number of inmates without some little contrivance), and made the best of all *ma murmurs* from Lady Charlotte, ex-

igeancies from Donna Eusebia, and provoking assumption of a right to expect everything, as a matter of course, from Kenneth.

But the London season, though certainly tedious, is not eternal. It came at last to an end. Eusebia farewelled her numerous adorers with a coruscation of glittering smiles, interspersed with the prettiest sighs, shakes of the head, and promises to see them all again the following spring. She allowed the Queen's ministers many parting audiences, — and permitted herself to accept a riding-whip encrusted with jewels from the Austrian ambassador. Grave statesmen forgot their personal comforts, in the bewilderment of their regret, and had to return upstairs, and hunt for heavy-handed umbrella or walking-stick, which is the awkwardest phase of all the small prosaic realities of life, after an emotional or sensational farewell. Young attachés smoked treble the number of cigars they were accustomed to, — musing on the blank days soon coming in which there was to be no Donna Eusebia, — and felt all the more feverish and discontented in their exaggerated cloud of tobacco. The Bishop of ——— endeavoured to point out to his wife how agreeable the musical talent of the Spaniard would be in their country house, if his helpmate would propose such a visit, but found an unchristian stubbornness in that worthy lady as to the point in question. And in the midst of such regrets, jealousies, lamentings, the beautiful Eusebia vanished away to Spain!

Nor did she return to comfort the sorrowing adorers of her brief period of glory for a very considerable period. What with debts, and difficulties, and laziness, and wilful wanderings; what, with Eusebia's detestation of the idea of a residence at Torrieburn, and Kenneth's habit of living *au jour le jour*, and thinking only how much pleasure could be crammed into each; what with (in short) all the small and great impediments, — the importance of whose aggregate amazes us when we stand still and consider their influence on long lapses of time, — it was full seven years from the date of that London triumph, when Kenneth and Eusebia once more drove up to the stone archway of Glenrossie Castle; bringing with them the only offspring of their marriage, — a little girl as picturesquely beautiful as her mother, but very unlike her; pale and timid, with such a wealth of shy love in her eyes, that they scarce seemed to belong to a mere child, when she looked up at you. And, after the relatives had once more met

together, it seemed to Gertrude that she was receiving a different Kenneth and a different Eusebia. Sharp and querulous was the tone adopted by the beautiful Spaniard; sullen, dogged, and provoking, Kenneth's manner in return. Her beauty endured, — but it was more hard, more bright, more *assisted*, than before. Her coquetry had kept in harmony with that change, and seemed bolder and less harmless. Her child she treated with perfect indifference, except when some sharp reproach as to its way of standing, looking, or moving, escaped her lips. And Gertrude observed that at such times the little creature would retreat, and put her tiny hand into her father's, and that Kenneth's sulky bitterness to his wife increased tenfold for the nonce. He was evidently unhappy and disturbed in mind; and Eusebia weary of his destiny and its difficulties. The passion of bygone days had passed away like the light off the hills. They were sick of each other, and of their mutual anxieties; nor had they been guests many days before each made the embarrassing confidence of their griefs against each other, to the person least willing to hear them; namely, Gertrude herself. In vain that sweet peace-maker endeavoured to heal differences. To Kenneth the preaching of indulgence, patience, and the strength of family ties, was simply "bosh." To Eusebia the expectation of fidelity and discretion, economy, and a willingness to retrieve money embarrassments, by residing quietly for some brief years in the only real home her husband possessed, was all impossible nonsense. She looked upon a wife's duties as on a mercantile ledger. The *per contra* had not been deserved by Kenneth, and she did not feel bound to pay it to him. A cold mist seemed to enter with them into the genial home at Glenromie; but even Gertrude little foresaw the strange turns of fate that were to follow.

Maggie was the first to enter into the storm. The money difficulties which had long oppressed Kenneth had rebounded upon her, in the tightening and denial of a thousand little resources for her simple pleasures. He had cut down trees she and his father had planted "at the back o' the hill:" he had raised, and again raised, the rent of the mills; which the old miller was loth to surrender, and unable to keep up. His letters to his mother had been more like commands severely issued to an imprudent steward than requests to a parent; and, finally, he had taken his affairs out of

the hands of Sir Douglas's factor (as to a dutiful), and made over their management to the factor of Dowager Clochnahane: a very man of whose connivance with her in the matter of the cart-wheel, Maggie and her father had gone to complain the day Lorimer Boyd discussed their right to do so with his mother.

Maggie was glad to see her son — an altered son! So glad that a little of the gaiety brimmed over even to Donna Eusebia. She asked him if she mightn't walk with him to the Mill, the day he announced his intention to go there. Her large blue eyes — only beauty still perfect in her rapid coarsening and reddened face — looked wistfully into the eyes of her "ain lad."

"The auld man's gettin' no that strong," she said.

Kenneth made no answer.

"And his sight's no sae gude as it's been," she added doubtfully.

"He seems still to have a sharp eye to his own interest," laughed Kenneth.

Maggie was a little puzzled, and a little fearful, lest, in her pity for her father, she should make him out too infirm for business. She tried an echo of Kenneth's laugh.

"Oo ay," she said; "he'll do weel aye readin' his ain bills, and settlin'."

"Well I'm going to 'settle a' to-day, dear mother, and make an end; for they really can't go on as they have done years past."

Maggie turned, and walking as she were, she flung herself full on Kenneth's breast. "Oo, Kenneth, my ain bairn! wee bairn, my bonny king o' man! deal saftly wi' the auld man, for the ain mither's sake! He's a' when he's noo, wi' sair trouble, and mither's bid wi' rheumatis. Will ye gie me a promise, Kenneth? Will ye gie me a promise my ain bonny lad?"

The awkward coaxing, — the *ah!* poor Maggie, how rare such a sight in you! to seem what she was, — seem cheerful, hopeful, and relying, — her soul was fainting with fear — Kenneth instead of touching her — half-turned, half-repulsed her — and said severely, "Mother, business for women; never let us talk back."

And then those two — close to the holiest of human bonds, under every circumstance of life and its accidents — walked on in silence together the door of the Mill.

CHAPTER XII.

KENNETH MAKES SOME LITTLE ARRANGEMENTS.

WITH a slight inclination of his handsome insolent head, Kenneth took a chair opposite the old miller, who was seated so exactly in the same attitude and in the same spot as on the former occasion of a like unwelcome visit, that he looked like a faded picture of his former self.

Faded—and, as his wife expressed it, “doited”—with years, drink, and anxiety. She rose hastily, and in a hurried whisper, and with a slight but not unkindly shake of the old man’s arm, she said,

“Mak’ the best o’ yeresel’, Peter, — here’s the Laird.”

The old miller turned a stupefied gaze on the new-comers. Some dim consciousness of Maggie’s ill-repressed emotion seemed to strike him, for addressing her first, he murmured, “What ails ye, Meg? What ails my bonnie lassie?” Then, feebly staring for a few seconds at Kenneth’s face, he slowly delivered himself of the ill-judged greeting, — “Ye’re changed for the waur. I sud scarce hae known ye.”

Maggie moved round to her father’s chair, and laid her large fair hand caressingly on his shoulder.

“It’s gay hot in they Spanish countries, and he’s a wheen dairker. But ’deed I think he’s a’ the bonnier,” added she, looking with some motherly pride at the alien son she always called her “ain lad.”

“Ye’re blind or blate, Meg, no to see the change that’s come ow’r him,” testily interrupted the miller; “but ’ilka corbie thinks its ain bird the whitest,’ and that’s a true sayin’.”

Kenneth was looking out towards the path beyond the open door, and answered only by a smile of evil augury and a muttered sentence about Maggie not being the only one who was “blind and blate.” Presently the threshold was darkened by the entrance of the Clochnaben factor. The countenances of the women fell, and the old miller’s brow lowered with a sort of helpless anger. Maggie still stood by his chair, and her gay dress, decorated bonnet, and handsome shawl (gauds which she had put on to walk with Kenneth, and defy the possible presence of Eusebia) made a strange contrast to the dull shabbiness and smoke-dried tints of everything round her.

The factor’s greeting to the inmates of the house was if possible less courteous even than Kenneth’s, but obsequious almost to

caricature when addressing “the Laird.” He made excuses for arriving a few minutes late, on the plea that the Dowager, who was such “an awfu’ woman to contravene,” had insisted, before he set out, on discussing with him the possibility of establishing at Torrieburn Mills a favourite tenant of her own; a man “warm and weel to do,” and willing to afford very liberal terms for his lease. Maggie opened her great blue eyes with a wide and angry gaze.

“Hoot,” she said “it’ll be time to think o’ new tenants when the auld man’s dead and gane. Ye’ve had word enough from my father no to come to the mill at a’, but send a bit o’ writin’ when ye’ve anything to say to him.”

“I appointed Mr. Dure to meet me here!” exclaimed Kenneth, imperiously; “I can’t have business interfered with and delayed for petty quarrels. I’m here to look over accounts and inspect possible improvements, and I must beg, my dear mother, that you and Mrs. Carmichael will withdraw, and not interrupt us.”

He waved his hand, as he spoke, with a gesture of impatient command, and Mr. Dure rose and opened an inner door which led to a yet more dingy room, and then, as it were, turned Maggie into it, swelling with wrath and sorrow. There she and her mother sat down in silence; the elder woman rocking herself to and fro with an occasional moan, and the younger keeping her angry blue eyes intently fixed on the heavy paneling that shut out her ill-used father. It was not easy through its old-fashioned thickness to hear much of what took place; and indeed the colloquy was not very long, for Mr. Dure and Kenneth had met merely to arrange matters on a foregone conclusion.

At first, after the formal hearing of accounts, &c., Carmichael’s voice was heard apparently reasoning, though in a peevish and plaintive tone; but as the discussion proceeded, his words became shrill and hoarse, and at last they distinctly heard him say, “I wanna leave; I wanna stir; I’ll hae it oot wi’ ye, if there’s law in Scotland. Yere father set me here; an’ here I’ll live and here I’ll dee, in spite o’ a’ the factors and n’er-do-weels in Christendom. My Meg will awa’ up to Glenrossie and see what Sir Douglas ’ll say to sicna a proposition, and I mysel’” —

“Silence, Sir!” furiously broke in the incensed Kenneth, without giving him time to finish the phrase. “Sir Douglas is not my master, nor master of Torrieburn. I am master here, as you shall find; and if you take this insolent tone with me, you’ll have

to look out a new home a good deal sooner than I at first intended, or Mr. Dure proposed."

"If Sir Douglas is not yere master, ye heartless braggart," retorted the exasperated old man, "Mr. Dure's no mine; and I tell ye" —

Here Maggie violently flung open the door that separated them, and clasped her father in her arms, with sobs and kisses and vehement ejaculations.

"Ye'll come and live at Torrieburn, daddy; ye'll come and live wi' yere ain Meg at Torrieburn."

But Kenneth — beside himself with rage at the appeal to Sir Douglas, and the term "heartless braggart" applied to himself, made it very clear the old miller should not "come and live with his ain Meg" at Torrieburn.

Then poor Maggie, in spite of her gay dress, and vulgar speech, and overgrown proportions of vanishing beauty, became almost sublime.

She ceased, for once, the loud yowling, in which she commonly expressed her grief; she turned very pale, which was also unusual with her; and as her father gave vent to a sort of malediction on her son, hoping that if he went on as he was doing, he might live to lose his own home, and have to sell Torrieburn to strangers, to balance his debts and extravagance, and then "might ca' to mind this bitter day," she folded the feeble, angry old man to her bosom with a shuddering embrace, and turned with wistful energy to Kenneth.

"Noo, Kenneth," she said, "ye'll hear my words this day! Gin' ye deal sae ill and sae hardly by my fayther, — and he auld and sick, and past his best," — (and here she gave the withered cheek a passionate kiss), — "dinna think I'll see it, and let it gang by! I've loved ye aye dearly, wi' a mither's true love, though ye've made but a sorry son! I've loved ye for yere ain sel', and I've loved ye for sake's sake, — for him ye're sae like — (and I wad that yere heart were as like as yere face to him. God rest him, my ain dear mon!) But so sure as ye set yere foot on my auld fayther, it'll end a', and I'll awa' frae Torrieburn wi' him, and wi' my mither and ye'll see nae mair o' me! Ye've got set amang fine folk, Kenneth; and ye forget times when I nursed ye, and sang to ye, and made ye my treasure, and never dreaded the shame; but I'll no forget the days when I was a nurslin' wean, and sat in the sun, and made castles o' pebbles and moss oot by the Falls, and saw fayther coming ow'r the bridge wi' a

spile for me and mither! It was a poorer hame than what I've had since, but there was love in it; love — Kenneth — love!" and Maggie's voice once more swelled to a cry, as with the passionate apostrophe of Ruth, she added, "and sae where the auld folks gang, I'll gang, and I'll no forsake them nor leave them, sill God Himself parts us, as He parted me frae my only love."

The breathless rapidity and vehemence with which these sentences were uttered would have prevented interruption, even had Kenneth attempted to interrupt instead of standing speechless with amazement. No answering sympathy woke in his breast. Surprise — and a vague impression of his mother's picturesqueness — as the fair, outlined, brightly dressed, golden-haired creature stood up against the brown wisecoting and dark surrounding objects, like a passion-flower that had trailed in among dead leaves — surprise, and an admission of her beauty, — these were the only sensations with which the scene inspired him. And when Maggie, descending from its pedestal of that greater emotion, became more like the Maggie of usual days, and with loud weeping and clinging, besought him to "think better o't, like a gude bairn lad," he all but shook himself free, and with the words — "I believe you are all mad, and I'm sure I have troubles enough of my own to drive me into keeping your company," he left the grieving group to console each other as they best might, and, anxiously resuming calculations and explanations with the shrewd factor of the stern Dowager, slowly returned with him to the point in their mountain path where the roads diverged, the one leading to Cloven-hen and the other to Glenrossie.

CHAPTER XLII.

KENNETH UNHAPPY.

It was true, as Kenneth had said, that he had troubles enough of his own to drive a man mad. And it was true, as the old miller had said, that he was "changed for the waur." His beauty had not departed; it consisted in perfection of feature and perfection of form; but it was blurred and blighted by that indescribable change which is the result of continual intemperance and dissipation. That peculiar look in the eye — weary and yet restless; in the mouth — burnt and faded, even while preserving the outlines of youth; in the figure, when a degree of natural grace, nor skill in the art of dress, prevents it from seeming limp and

shrunken, — all these things had come to Kenneth Ross, and changed him "for the waur."

And more had come to him — the conviction that his Spanish wife no longer felt the smallest attachment for him; and the belief that, so far as her nature was capable of attachment, she was attached to some one else. Long angry watches had taught him that, like many of her nation, intrigue and deception were a positive amusement to her, and that the next pleasure in life to being admired was to be able to outwit. A sentiment not indeed peculiar to Eusebia, but to the people of her land. It runs through all their comedies, through all their lighter literature, through all their pictures of their own social life. That combination of events which in the novels and plays of other countries is made up of the interweaving or opposition of human passions is made up among them of the pitting of skill against skill. They do indeed acknowledge one other passion, and that is love (according to their notion of love); and a very swift-winged Cupid he is. "Who has not loved, has not lived," is one of their proverbs; but love itself would be uninteresting in Spain, if he had to go through no shifts or disguises.

Kenneth had never *proved* any more reprehensible fact in Donna Eusebia's conduct than the giving to one of her adorers a seal, on which was engraved a Cupid beating a drum, with the motto "*Todos le siguen*;" — and she met his reproof on that occasion with laughing defiance. But the want of certainty did not lessen his distrust. His temper, always imperious and passionate, had become fierce. Eusebia, on the other hand, was fearless; and she was also *taquineuse*, or *taquinante*; she was fond of teasing, and rather enjoyed the irritation she roused up to a certain point. She darted sharp words at him with mocking smiles, — as the toreadors fling little arrows with lighted matches appended to them, in the bull-fights of Spain. And she met the result with equal skill and determination. You could not frighten Eusebia. The spirit of a lioness lived in that antelope form, so lithe and slender. If you had twisted all her glossy hair round your hand and raised a poniard to stab her to the heart, she would not have trembled, neither would she have implored mercy; — but she would have strangled you before you had time to strike!

Their fierce strange quarrels, that burst like a hurricane and then passed over, were marvel and a mystery to Gertrude, and

the intervals of tenderness between those quarrels had become rare and transient in both parties. Eusebia had grown moody and careless, and Kenneth was often positively outrageous. And he was unhappy — yes, really unhappy; wrapped in self, and finding self miserable; and thinking it everybody's fault but his own.

Gertrude then had the *role* forced on her, so painful to all persons of keen and delicate feelings, of being appealed to, — complained to, — made umpire in those disputes of the soul, that war of mystery, when alienation exists between man and wife. Kenneth especially, who had neither reticence nor self-command, would come vehemently into her morning-room, and flinging himself down on the bright green cushions, worked with spring and summer flowers, cast his weary angry eyes round him, — not on, but across, all the lovely peaceful objects with which that room was filled, — into some vacancy of discontent that seemed to lie beyond, and give vent to the bitterest maledictions on his own folly for being caught by a fascinating face, and a few phrases of broken English spoken in a musical voice, — and declare his determination as soon as he could possibly arrange his affairs, and raise money enough to pay his debts, to settle an income on his foreign wife and never see her more.

It was on one of those occasions (little varied and often repeated), that a memorable scene took place. The soft pleading of Gertrude's serene eyes; her grave sentences on duty, and self-sacrifice, and reform of faults; the appeals to his better nature; the allusions to the long, long years before him, if he lived the common length of human life; the hopeful arguments, to him who was so resolved on hopelessness; the innocent cordial smile that irradiated her face while she strove to cheer with words: all these things had a different effect on Kenneth from that which she intended to produce. Those men in whom passion is very strong, and affection and reason very weak, have a strange sort of bounded, external comprehension, during such attempts to argue with them. They seem not to listen, but to see: to contemplate their own thoughts and the countenance of the person attempting to controvert those thoughts: to receive the impression that they are contradicted; while the depth of their inner nature remains utterly unreached and unconvinced. To attempt reasonable argument with such natures is like digging through earth and roots, only to come at last upon a slab of stone.

Through the shallow earth and twisted morbid roots of thought in Kenneth's composition the words of Gertrude had penetrated — but no farther. While she spoke he was silent; he mused and gazed and sighed. He saw *her* — not the drift of what she was saying; and the same wild mixture of anger and preference (which such men as Kenneth call "love") woke in his heart, and maddened him, as in the Villa Mandorlo the day he proposed, and was told she was engaged to his uncle. Eusebia became as nothing in his comparison at that moment of the two women. He felt as if he had been spell-bound by some witchcraft, and that the spell was suddenly broken. He rose from the embroidered ottoman where he had been lounging; and as Gertrude crowned all her fabric of half-heard reasoning with a gentle hesitating allusion to the steady self-denying years, and active serviceable youth of Sir Douglas, and contrasted its practical possibility with the wasted energies of a life of pleasure and extravagance such as Kenneth had led, he suddenly and wildly burst through all bounds of decent constraint, and exclaimed, —

"That is it! *That* is the curse on my life; and you know it! It is because *you* were taken from me by treachery and falsehood that I am what I am. I never really loved any woman but you; I loathe the coquetry and paint and affectation to which I am tied. I hate Eusebia! I cast her off: I have done with her. I love *you*! and you did once love me. Oh, love me still — love me now — *love me*! or — I will shoot myself!"

With the last vehement words, and while Gertrude stood up petrified and breathless, he flung his arms round her, and clasped her to his breast, in a fierce and passionate embrace.

"You are mad — Kenneth Ross!" was all Gertrude could utter, as he suddenly released her at the sound of the door opening behind them. He looked round, still panting with excitement. Sir Douglas stood up there, holding the little pale girl with liquid eyes, Kenneth's only child, by the hand.

"Your little Effie has been hunting for you everywhere, Kenneth; Eusebia wishes you to accompany her to see the deer that was wounded and taken alive yesterday by the keepers. Neil is waiting for you, cap in hand, at the bottom of the great staircase."

Except that his air was a shade more stately, and his lip less smiling than was

his wont in addressing Kenneth, no one could have told that Sir Douglas's manner was different from usual, or that a pang, sharp, rapid, and instantly repressed, shot through his heart, and flushed his broad frank temples.

Kenneth did not absolutely say "D——a Eusebia!" but he set his white teeth with some such muttered ejaculation, and grasped the tiny hand of his little girl so tight when she moved towards him, that they saw the child look plaintively and wonderingly up in his face as the door closed.

Then Sir Douglas turned from looking after them, and looked towards Gertrude.

His eyes wore an expression of wistful questioning; but Gertrude remained silent and deadly pale. There was a little pause. Her eyes lifted to his, and filled with tears. "Gertrude, my Gertrude! What in God's name was Kenneth saying to you in such a frantic tone before I opened the door!"

What was Kenneth saying? How could she tell his uncle — how could she tell her husband — what Kenneth was saying! It was a relief (a partial relief) to know that Sir Douglas had not witnessed the wild embrace with which the wild words had been accompanied; he was bending down his stately head, while he opened the door of the bright morning-room, to listen to the child's timid voice, and her message from her mother.

What had Kenneth been saying?

Gertrude faltered in her answer.

"Things are going badly between him and Eusebia," she said at length.

Sir Douglas paused again, and looked sorrowfully at his wife.

"You need not waste so much sympathy upon him, Gertrude. Be sure it is not altogether Eusebia's fault."

"Oh! do not think my sympathies are with Kenneth," said Gertrude, eagerly. Then, embarrassed and miserable, she ceased, and the colour came back in crimson waves to her pallid cheek.

"Sit down, Gertrude; why are you standing? What has moved you in this matter? I was coming to speak with you about Kenneth when I met his child on the stair. It is not only with his wife that Kenneth quarrels, but with his unhappy mother — at least, so I gather from her confused explanations. He has given notice to Carmichael to quit the mills."

"Oh, Douglas!"

"The old man has no real title to remain. All that was a matter of indulgence and careless arrangement with my poor brother. But Mrs. Ross-Heaton says, if the old people

may not live at Torrieburn, neither will she. She is in a dreadful state (you know how violent she is in the expression of her feelings), and she cannot be brought to comprehend that I have no power to order it otherwise."

"She could hardly think Eusebia would consent (if ever Eusebia settles at Torrieburn) to live *en famille* with Carmichael and his wife. Poor souls!"

"No. And of course Kenneth can do what he pleases, though he seems to have done it unkindly (that factor of Clochnaben's is such a hard man!). But what I was thinking was this: you know the old mill that you called the 'Far-away-house,' that stands on the boundary line of what is to be your domain when you are a widow?" — and here Sir Douglas smiled a tender smile at his young wife — tender, and rather sad, for every now and then that "gap of years" which had been spanned over for them by the airy bridge of love, haunted his heart, and "Old Sir Douglas" caught himself thinking what would be, after he was gone! While he lived — even to the last gasp of fleeting life — he would see that sweet face and hear that gentle voice. But he was young!

Ah! blind mortal creatures, who for ever contemplate with dread the one parting and appointments (foreknown and inevitable), and think so little of all the rash partings we make for ourselves! The alienations in marriages; the once dear names forbidden to be sounded; the exile of fair lands; the drifting asunder by divers lots in life; the tribulations, the despairs, the misunderstandings, the necessities of our human existence; for each parting made by death, it is not exaggeration to say that of these other things there are thousands — bitterer, yea, bitterer, than death itself. But Sir Douglas thought of none of these things; only of his wife and of the kindly present deed that was meditating.

"That mill," he said, "though not near so good a business as the one at Torrieburn Mills, would give him a certain feeling of independence, and as much employment as he is fit for, in his broken state. As to the loss upon it for us, it is nothing; we will not think of that, and I will make arrangements by which it shall be included in the dowry settled upon you. You will turn him out?"

And again the tender smile shone from his noble face, and Gertrude, as she leaned her cheek against his hand, could not refrain from tears, — a brief April shower, but had its sunshine near. It relieved her.

She rose once more, and kissed Sir Douglas on the forehead.

"We will go together to Torrieburn, and propose it to him," said the latter, after a brief pause. "He is deeply wounded, and not what he used to be, and these moods require tender handling."

"Tender handling," indeed, they found it required. Even Sir Douglas's patience was well-nigh exhausted before he had convinced the obstinate old man that he had little choice as to moving, and that what was now proposed was intended as an act of kindness. When at last it was so understood, the acceptance was made with gloomy resignation, not with gratitude. "Needs must when the devil drives," was the final phrase of the Miller; while Maggie, who held passionately to her resolution of leaving with her departing parents, startled poor Gertrude with a speech somewhat enigmatical to Sir Douglas, but not to his wife, delivering herself with broken sobs, of the sentences — "Ah! ye may weel seek to mak' amends; but gin ye had married wi' my braw lad yerseel' we sud no ha' sat greetin' this day! Ye'd no ha' needed a' they gauds and jewels that Kenneth has paid sae dear for, — and ye'd ha' been quiet, maybe, at Torrieburn, as ye are noo at Glenrossie."

So that even Gertrude's merits were somehow turned to an offence in the eyes of Maggie Ross-Heaton and her "forbears."

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. JAMES FRERE'S ANTECEDENTS.

OF James Frere little had ever been heard by the party at Glenrossie, except one brief missive, recommending particular books for the school, and stating that his uncle in Shropshire having died and left him a little money, he was going to New Zealand. But one morning back came the eloquent preacher, quite unexpectedly, to the intense triumph of Dowager Clochnaben, who had received with a resentment most openly expressed, the intelligence of all the suspicions that had so long rested on that injured martyr of society. "Sift news first, and swallow it afterwards," was the dictum with which she favoured her son Lorimer in a letter descriptive of the welcome event, and full of taunts as to the little wisdom of those who were "book-learned," which she thanked God she was not.

And indeed Dowager Clochnaben was

entirely of the opinion of a young officer whose wife had much talent for verse-writing, and who, when a friend remarked that she would do well to study the best authors, eagerly replied, "Oh, no, she doesn't read at all: *she says it destroys all originality of thought.*"

"Practical good sense" was what Dowager Clochnaben piqued herself upon; and like most very narrow-minded persons, she somehow held that quality to be incompatible with intellectual occupations. "Lorimer's very clever, and his writing is considered first-rate," she would say, "but I've more practical good sense in my little finger than he has in his head."

Convinced of her own practical good sense, how could she doubt the correctness of her judgment of her neighbours, or how avoid the profound conviction that they were always wrong if they were not exactly of her opinion?

She had "taken up with" Mr. James Frere; and she defended him, growled over him, and held him to be her own peculiar property. Her exultation therefore may be conceived when he drove up to the yet unbarred doors of Clochnaben Castle in a light car from the nearest post-house, while the morning mists were yet shrouding craggy peak and purple hill, and lying on the bosom of the sleeping lake. Very cold, very damp, much fatigued, but apparently in high health and spirits; and answering the grim gladness of her welcome with a flash of his brilliant eyes and a hearty shake of her extended hands, while she ordered breakfast and a fire in the large cold room, which she comfortably assured him no one had ever slept in since his departure. That might be true, he thought, for the Dowager was not given to hospitality; and as he entered the apartment the mildewy, stony, unopened smell smote on his senses in confirmation of her words, and the long thin tartan curtain which protected the somewhat rickety and creaking old door, flew out, full of dust, in the current of air, and met him; as if it also desired to give a witch-like greeting on his return.

Little Mr. James Frere cared for mildew or moth, or the damp corners in the ceiling overhead. He warned himself; he washed himself; he brushed his abundant black hair; he unpacked his travelling valise. He took out of it a large opossum skin, dressed and bound with crimson velvet, a small wooden box, in which lay a specimen nugget of Californian gold, a still smaller box which contained two large emeralds roughly polished but not yet faceted; a

thick book containing a journal of adventures in far distant countries; and several loose stones, brown and rugged and dirty-looking, but each with a tested corner that shone like a spark of light, from which he selected three, and laid all these things aside. Then he took out a blotting-book and a large soiled parchment case, on which was ostentatiously inscribed, Rev. James Frere: Testimonials; then he carefully re-locked the valise, laying at the top of its contents a case of pistols and a bearskin coat that seemed to have known much bad weather; after which he proceeded downstairs, and in a simple careless way presented the valuables he had collected to his hostess, with many expressions of gratitude for past shelter and protection, and many a pious text of "thanksgiving to the Lord," who had preserved him by land and sea, in perils among savages and perils of the deep, in perils by night and perils by day, and granted him to return (even though but for a season) "among those he had carried in his heart wherever he had journeyed."

Then, in the most natural way in the world, Mr. James Frere passed to his journal, his testimonials, and the "blessed fact" of a grant from Government of a tolerably large sum of money to reimburse losses and expenses he had sustained in the burning of schools he had erected in New Zealand, and other services he had rendered, which had been duly set forth, and admitted; and he displayed with pardonable pride, the letters he had received from official personages in answer to his applications.

It was a happy accident that brought Alice Ross (unexpectedly also, of course) to Clochnaben, the very same morning that Mr. James Frere had returned. She showed as much pleasurable surprise as the occasion demanded, and no more; only, as she subsided demurely into one of the stiff high-backed chairs with red leather seats, which they had all occupied the first evening James Frere was at Clochnaben, so obviously a shiver thrilled through her frame that he politely inquired whether she felt cold, and while she said her slow deliberate "No, I thank ye, Mr. Frere," the gleam between her half-closed eyes became a trembling glitter; and with something more of impulse than usual, she put forth one of those little feline hands whose small sharp claws for him were always sheathed in velvet, and murmured, "I'm quite pleased to see you looking so well after the voyage home, and all your — fatigues."

There was a little — very little hesitation

at the last word, and again the trembling shiver seemed to ripple through the slight figure sitting erect in the high-backed chair. But by and by, chatting by the broad hearth as formerly, throwing in the cones and cuttings of fir plantations ("to make the peat burn merrier," as young Neil Douglas had once expressed it), Alice became quite comfortable again. She accepted with quiet alacrity the proposal that the groom should ride over to Glenrossie to say she would sleep at Clochnaben, and also to notify Mr. Frere's safe return.

But, as things in real life are said to be stranger than fiction, a series of accidental circumstances had already made the inmates of Glenrossie aware of that happy fact, and of very much more respecting that over-welcomed individual.

Lady Charlotte was on her way for her annual visit to her daughter; with little Neil as her escort, who was in all the glorious independence of his "first half" at Eton. The train was very full,—the shooting-season having just begun,—and Neil was separated from his grandmother, and put into the next carriage,—nothing loth; it seemed to him more merry, more like travelling, alone. At the last minute a very feeble, slender, gentleman-like old man, leaning on his servant, was led to the door of the carriage in which the little lad was seated. So trembling and so infirm, that the kindly natured and impulsive boy stretched out his little sturdy arm with mute offer of assistance. The infirm gentleman seemed, however, afraid to trust himself to such support, and after an effort or two succeeded in entering and seating himself in the furthest corner by the window. The servant touched his hat respectfully, and said compassionately, "I wish you a good journey, sir. I hope if you should be took worse you'll telegraph for me. I'll come up by the night mail in no time." Then, slipping half-a-crown into the guard's hand, he said, "Really master's hardly fit to travel: will you endeavour to keep that compartment from crowding?"

Two other passengers only were in the carriage besides Neil Douglas. They got out at Carlisle. When they were gone the old gentleman seemed to get very restless; his back was turned to Neil; he kept rustling and searching in his travelling-bag for something which apparently he could not find. At first Neil took little notice; he also was occupied. One of his prize-books was "Rokeby," and he was deep in sympathy with Bertram. The rustling and searching rather annoyed him, but it ceased

at last, and, having finished the scene he was reading, he gave a deep satisfied sigh, and looked up.

To his intense astonishment the old gentleman with his green shade, trembling hands, and infirm stoop of the shoulders had vanished; and in his place sat a man of about thirty-five, with dark bright, watchful eyes, which were fixed for the moment on Neil's face with keen scrutiny.

The boy's heart beat hard and quick. "Here is a *real* robber," he thought. But he was a brave boy—as became a son of Sir Douglas; and he retained nerve and presence of mind enough to appear again absorbed in his reading, as he really had been immediately before this terrible discovery.

The stranger slowly turned away that bright fascinating gaze, as a rattlesnake might relieve his prey, and looked steadily out of the window on his own side. They were nearing a station; Neil saw him prepare to clasp and lock the bag in which he had been searching. The white beard, the green shade, the comfortable old velvet travelling night-cap, peeped out under his hand as he thrust them all in. His fingers were strong, though long and meagre, and on the back of his right hand was a great healed scar.

The train slackened—drew up to the station—stopped. Neil called out—loud, very loud—to be let out. He almost tumbled down the step in his hurry, and put his head in at the window of the next carriage.

"Oh! Mammy-Charlotte" (Lady Charlotte had created this graceful substitute for the unwelcome title of "grandmama," pleading as her excuse that it was "so much more affectionate, being called by one's own name, you know,")—"Oh! Mammy-Charlotte, let me come in here and have half your place, or even sit at your feet on the floor. There is a real robber in the next carriage! He has changed all his clothes, and is turned quite into a different man. There! there! Mammy-Charlotte—look! that is the man. Don't you remember the old, old gentleman who got in where I was? With a servant who helped him? Well, he is changed into *that*!"

Lady Charlotte gave a little subdued shriek, though she hardly knew why, and called, "Guard! guard!" in an alarmed voice. The guard was busy; every one was busy; but one of the porters civilly said he would call the guard.

"Oh! do—pray do—and you shall have sixpence; there is a gentleman who

has changed all his clothes in the carriage; pray call the guard!"

The guard came, and opening the door asked which of the ladies had been insulted.

"Oh! dear me," said Lady Charlotte, rather shocked at the way the question was put, "nobody has insulted anybody, only a gentleman has changed all his clothes; this dear boy was in the carriage with him: such an escape!"

"He was disguised, you know," interposed Neil, endeavouring to make the matter more intelligible, and, addressing the guard; "he took off all his disguises, and turned into another man: I assure you he did!" The guard looked puzzled, and rather incredulous; the bell rang for starting; the doors were all shut in succession with a heavy bang; the whistle sounded; nobody had got out who had not paid for a ticket, and given a ticket. It was nobody's business if a gentleman had chosen to get in dressed like a pantaloon, and get out again dressed like a harlequin. The guard nodded an "all right" to Lady Charlotte, as she vehemently requested that Neil might change his seat and come to her, and the train went off as the boy jumped in. As it moved away the pathway behind and beyond the station became visible, and a man, who was slowly walking away, carrying a black travelling-bag, looked back at the train.

"There, Mammy-Charlotte! There!" eagerly exclaimed Neil; and he pointed to the receding figure.

"Heaven preserve us all in our beds," said Lady Charlotte, in a tone of intense terror; "it is that Mr. James Frere! It is indeed! It is Mr. Frere! What can he be doing? What can he have done—frightening one in this way!" And during the whole of the evening after her arrival at Glenrossie, Lady Charlotte continued in a nervous flutter, repeating over and over again the strange story, and commenting upon it, and making Neil describe "the dreadful metamorphosis" of which he had been an eye-witness.

"And to think of Mr. Frere, of all people in the world, doing such a thing! He, who used, you know, to be so very tidy, and indeed elegant, in his suit of black, with only of an evening a narrow little lace to the end of his cravat, which I thought quite pretty, and very harmless of course, though unusual. And now to go about like Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves when they were put in the oil-jars! Not that any such thing has happened to him; I wish there could,

just to punish him for startling one so; though, of course, as he was but one, it oughtn't to be so frightful; and I believe Neil wasn't frightened a bit, and wouldn't have been, if all the Forty had been there."

"I was very much startled," said the boy: "I don't know if I was frightened. I certainly thought he was a robber; but he wouldn't have got much by robbing me; and I don't suppose he would have killed me, only knocked me senseless perhaps. I'm glad it wasn't a robber!"

"But I think it is much worse," said Lady Charlotte, plaintively, pulling her ringlet, "because one knows what a robber means, and what he is at, whereas it is so—so dreadfully mysterious about Mr. Frere!"

They all agreed that it was "dreadfully mysterious;" only Alice boldly said she did not believe it was Mr. Frere at all; that Lady Charlotte had only seen him at a distance, and might be mistaken; and Sir Douglas inclined to the same opinion. Lady Charlotte, on the other hand, was confident she had made no mistake. And so matters rested, till, on the second day after that adventure of Neil's in the railway, the message was received from Alice, as already narrated, to say she would sleep at Clochnaben, and to tell of Mr. Frere's arrival.

Enjoy the pleasant evening, and the long wakeful hours of the wintry night, Alice Roes! Pile the crackling fir-twigs and the little cones that spout fire and laugh as they burn! Watch the warm light flicker over lip and brow, and seem to rest itself in those large radiant eyes. Talk of the past! and plan for the future! For in the dawa of the morrow there is the darkness of the thunder-cloud, and in its noon the bursting of the storm!

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CAREER OF SHIFTS AND CONTRIVANCES.

BY some curious coincidence a letter from Lorimer Boyd, entirely on the subject of Mr. James Frere and his doings or misdoings, arrived at the Castle, just as a stranger had inquired for Sir Douglas, and requested to speak to him "on very particular business," which business also turned out to be the doings and misdoings of Dowager Clochnaben's *protege*.

The stranger declared himself to be a Mr. Mitchell, a detective from London, in search of a person calling himself James Frere, but who had gone by various other names, if he was the same man respecting

whom Mr. Mitchell had received instructions; and he was perfectly able to identify the said James Frere, if he could fall in with him, having known him well during a period of imprisonment which he had suffered some years since, for obtaining money under false pretences.

That the present charge was for surreptitiously obtaining the baggage and papers of a fellow-passenger, who had been left at Jamaica, as was supposed, in a dying state — not expected to survive above a few hours; that the gentleman's disease had turned out to be an abscess on the liver, which burst, and he recovered, and was on his way to England to prosecute Mr. Frere, and obtain restitution, if possible, of the property taken, consisting chiefly of emeralds and diamonds in the rough; gold; and other matters, which could not so immediately have been turned into cash, as to make their seizure in the swindler's possession hopeless. Information had been received at Liverpool, and the authorities there had been on the look-out; but no person at all answering the description given, had been seen at any of the hotels. The matter had been put into Mitchell's hands and he had traced every passenger that landed from the same ship, except one. That one he, at length, traced to a little public-house in the outskirts of Liverpool; and though the personal appearance of the guest there seemed the very reverse of the man wanted, the detective was much too well accustomed to the shifts and disguises of these *chevaliers d'industrie*, to be the least discouraged on that account. He requested to be shown the room the stranger had occupied; declaring that a valuable diamond ring had been lost or purloined during his stay. The irate landlady told him that he might "dig the floor up" if he liked; that the room had been cleaned, and moreover occupied, since the gentleman was there; that nothing had been found; that her inn, "though poor, was honest," &c. &c.

Mitchell did not "dig the floor up," but he made a very minute search in drawers of tables, and out-of-the-way corners; and though he found little, it was apparently enough, for with a sharp frown, followed by a whistle and a peculiar smile, he ceased from his labors. Mitchell found in the grate (which had not since had a fire in it), first, the outer paper of a small box which had been sealed with three seals — two of them tolerable impressions of the initials and crest of the gentleman who had been robbed, the third melted and defaced; sec-

ondly, a twisted cord of the long grass of the country which had apparently tied up a package of that size; then an address label, torn across, with "Jonas Field, Passenger," upon it; the cover of an old letter, which had been used to wipe up ink spilt on the table, and being laid flat, was found to be addressed "Spencer Carew, Esq.;" and, finally, the distinct impression in an old blotting-book of a very hurried direction to "Miss Ross at Glenrossie, N. B."

Which last brought Mitchell to Scotland, and so into the presence of Sir Douglas.

It was James Frere's writing; there could be no doubt of that. Nor any doubt that the sight of it was a great shock to the master of Glenrossie; as Mitchell saw, when he placed the leaf in that soldier's hand, and observed the fingers tremble as they held it.

The astute officer looked round the handsome apartment as if he expected to see James Frere crouched under one of the tables, or emerging from the crimson curtains.

"Miss Ross one of the family, I presume?" said the detective.

"Yes," said Sir Douglas.

He spoke with such stern haughtiness that the man was rather put out, and muttered something about "the course of justice," and being there "in obedience to orders from his superiors," and other such phrases, which Sir Douglas cut short by saying, with a sort of sorrowful civility, "I am not blaming you. The person you are in search of is not here, but I have a letter on the same business from the Home Office in London. I will see you again when I have read through the papers that have been sent me, and meanwhile my servants will give you refreshments."

The Nemesis who was pursuing Frere, had willed that the invalid of Jamaica should be a personal friend of Lorimer Boyd, and that Boyd should be in London, on his way to another diplomatic appointment. Applications for assistance to the Home and Foreign Office were instantly made, and every help afforded; the loss incurred being little less than the loss of a life of savings on the part of one who imagined he was at last returning to enjoy competence and comfort in his native land. From Lorimer Boyd's letter, about "the man I always felt sure was a scoundrel and impostor," and from Mitchell the detective and his experience, Sir Douglas gleaned the history of James Frere as far as any one could trace it.

Who, or what he was, at the beginning,

Mitchell could not say. He was supposed to be the natural son of some gentleman; was well educated; and when very young was discharged from a mercantile house where he had been employed, for "extraordinary irregularity" in his accounts; on which occasion the head of the firm had severely observed, that he might "think himself fortunate in being *discharged* — not *prosecuted*." He had gone by the name of "John Delamere" in that employment: he dropped that title for one still more aristocratic, and called himself "Spencer Carew." An advertisement appearing in the papers for a "travelling tutor of agreeable manners and cheerful and indulgent disposition, to make a tour with a youth in weak health," — he answered the advertisement as the Rev. Francis Ferney, and referred for his recommendation to "Spencer Carew, Esq." The friend employed to select a travelling companion for the youth in question, saw Mr. Carew, and received the most satisfactory and brilliant accounts of the "Rev. Francis Ferney." They travelled together, for a year and a half; and though a good deal of surprise and discontent was expressed at the enormous expenses incurred under Mr. Ferney's management, no steps were taken till the friend who had inquired into his qualifications, accidentally coming face to face with him at the country house of the youth's uncle and guardian, recognised "Spencer Carew" in "Francis Ferney." He was prosecuted and imprisoned. He then appeared on the scene as a Dissenting minister, "Mr. Forbes," and was greatly admired for his eloquence; but having seduced one of the school teachers and abandoned her, he had to give up his congregation and try a new path. He became once more a tutor, and travelled in America with his pupil; forged the pupil's name to a letter of credit, and was imprisoned. The next two years were a blank; no one could tell what had become of him; but he cast up at Santa Fé de Bogota, teaching English in the family of a Spanish merchant; was caught in the very act of robbing the strong-box of his employer; and would have been again prosecuted, but for the discovery that he had lured the merchant's daughter into a secret marriage, and that the scandal of his prosecution would rebound on the family that had sheltered him. Was next heard of in Italy, doing duty at the English churches established on sufferance in that kingdom. Was on the point of marriage with a wealthy and enthusiastic spinster, when some one recognized him, and warned

the lady that he had a Spanish wife "beyond seas." Became much distressed for money in Naples, and connected himself with the worst of characters there. Planned the escape of one of his associates condemned to the galleys for murder; succeeded in assisting his evasion with two of his companions, was pursued and, fired upon by the soldiery, dropped from the castle wall into the sea, having received a bayonet wound on the back of his hand: swam to a boat already prepared for the adventure, and escaped to Procida — was not again taken. Reappeared in England in the employment of a wine merchant; forged his employer's name to a cheque for seven hundred and fifty pounds, and disappeared. Was afterwards traced to Scotland, where it was discovered that he was preaching under the name of James Frere. Disappeared when about to be arrested there, and cast up again in Australia. Travelled with a party of Englishmen who were cut off by the bushrangers; not without suspicion of having betrayed the former, to those by whom they were robbed and murdered. Took passage for England with the gentleman who was afterwards left, in ill-health, at Jamaica; pretending then to be a medical man on his way home from San Francisco. Possessed himself of all the baggage and valuables of his infirm companion (whose life at that time appeared to hang on a thread), and arrived in England under the circumstances already explained.

It was on the occasion of his adventure in Naples with the galley-slave condemned for murder, that Giuseppe had seen him, swimming, — with his wounded hand dripping blood as he shook it fiercely at his pursuers, — followed in vain by a rowing boat full of chattering and ejaculating soldiery, — while the light skiff that was lying off and on, suddenly spread her sails, and carried him swiftly out of reach.

Sir Douglas heard, then, and read, all these particulars respecting the impostor who had lived in such trusted intimacy with the inmates of Glenrosie: the successful rival, in religious eloquence, of poor Savile Heaton!

He ordered his horse and rode, unattended, to Clochnaben Castle: where, instantly seeking the miserable culprit, he taxed him with the facts narrated above; and in stern, brief words summoned him to admit or deny that he was the person to whom this wonderful outline of a bad, unprincipled life referred.

At first, Mr. James Frere made very light of Sir Douglas's information. He utterly

denied that he even understood to whom or to what his questions referred. But on Sir Douglas saying — "Beware what you do! — the detective who has traced you is now at Glenrossie Castle; — the gentleman you have robbed, has probably by this time landed in England; — if you are indeed the person they are seeking, denial is perfectly hopeless" — his tone changed; he stood as one transfixed; he trembled from head to foot; and after a faint attempt at bravado, dropped on his knees and besought mercy!

"I have had many excuses, a hard lot to contend with," he stammered out. "You would not surely give me up to justice, Sir Douglas! For God's sake consider! — give me time — give me means of escape: I will surrender all to you — give me a chance for the future! I have been starved — hunted down — persecuted: let me fly — all is here in this very house that belonged to that man; — I never intended to appropriate it! The things were under my charge — in my cabin.

"Sir Douglas, Sir Douglas, let me escape!" continued he, with increasing vehemence, as the stern contempt visible on the soldier's brow became more and more evident. "I will repent — reform! Oh God! Consider — your sister — is my WIFE!"

Sir Douglas started, as if he had been shot. Alice crept round to him, pale as a corpse.

"Let him go, BROTHER!" was all she said; but she clung to Sir Douglas's arm, as if it were the arm of the executioner raised to strike.

The soft slender hands locked and un-

locked themselves with helpless pleading, turning round his strong and strenuous wrist. The pale face slowly floated, as it were, underneath his, and looked with dreadful appeal into his eyes.

"You were right," she murmured, "that night on the hills; but I did not know it *then* — I did not feel it *then*. I have been deceived. But let him go! Oh, let him go!"

And Alice — impassive Alice — laid her white cheek on the panting heart of her proud soldier-brother and moaned, with the long low moan of a wounded animal.

"Take my horse and begone, wretched man!" at length broke forth from the lips of Sir Douglas. And as James Frere yet endeavoured to mutter sentences of excuse and explanation, and above all to assure Sir Douglas that he would find "every fraction of property correct, including trifles he had ventured to present to his kind patroness that morning" — the kind patroness proceeded to "speed the parting guest" by the bitter words, "Don't dirty *my* name by setting it between your thieves' teeth, man! Get to one of your dog-kennels of hiding, out of the sight of honest folk. And the sooner the gallows is lifted, on which you can hang, the better for all concerned. That's my dictum!"

"Ah! whom shall we trust!" groaned Sir Douglas, as the sound of the horse's hoofs violently galloping past Clochnaben towers, smote on his ear, and his half-sister Alice sank shivering in his tender embraces. "Whom shall we trust if *that* man is a liar, a hypocrite, and an assassin!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DOUBTS THAT STING.

WHOM to trust! Where trust is broken, in certain natures, there is not only no recovery, but, if I may so speak, no discernment. Such natures no longer distinguish who is loyal and who is false. In proportion to their love for the deceiver, is the belief that none now can be true. When young Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, admits to his grieving, half-maddened soul the conviction that his mother is unworthy, he does not reserve a better faith for the purity of Ophelia, or the matron holiness of spotless wives. He sweeps the whole sex into one dark gulf of degradation, and exclaims —

“Frailty, thy name is WOMAN!”

The franker and nobler a man's own nature is, the more is his confusion under such circumstances. How it could come to pass he knows not; but he, or she, or they whom he most trusted, whom he thought he had most reason to trust, are false; there is no doubt of *their* falsehood: *ergo*, none can be sincere.

Alice guided her canoe over the shallows and rapids of her half-brother's miserable thoughts with a skill which Satan only can supply to his worshippers. What she admitted — with showers of tears and pale gasping lips — helped her through that which she concealed; and though no explanation that could be given could clear her from her own share of dissimulation, she somehow contrived to seem a victim instead of an offender. “I was like one walking in a dream,” said she, passing her slender hand over her forehead in slow musing accompaniment to the slowly uttered words. “And then, besides, I was afraid. Afraid for *his* life — and — and —” (here her voice sank to a frightened whisper) “somewhat for my own. I didn't exactly know all — oh, not the *half* of all! But I knew he had not those scruples that — that most men have; and he had lived — he used to tell me that — in savage lands, where life is not made of the importance it is here; so many nameless deaths there, and sudden deaths, and none to ask about them —” and Alice gave a little shudder.

“Oh! he wasn't like you — he wasn't like *you* —” she continued; “he was a man eye fleeing from consequences. But he was not meant to be what he is; he had his excuses; his strange fate. I'm not

going to excuse him,” she faltered, as she watched Sir Douglas's listening face, “you know it was the *good* that took me. I thought I had a friend . . . and he took so to the schools . . . and he seemed a sort of brother . . . and he talked of leading souls to God . . . and indeed he made me his own — talking of heaven.

“And there was one other thing: I'll not deny it; I'll not make myself better than I am;” and she laid her trembling hand on Sir Douglas's wrist. “He seemed to love me so. You know I've been so lone, and so used to see others preferred — and there was love all around me — till I could have cried for envy of Lady Ross. You loved her; and Kenneth would die for her; and even Mr. Boyd. Oh, I could see why it was impossible he could fancy poor me; and indeed Kenneth as good as said it, even if I had not seen it. But this one man loved *me* — this one man loved *me*; and thought nothing of Lady Ross in comparison.”

The wonderful vehemence with which the pale, slender creature pronounced the last two sentences! And then seemed to sink away into abject sadness and submission; and raised her strange watchful eyes to peer into Sir Douglas's averted countenance with wavering gleams in them such as go over the sea on a dull, stormy day as she resumed in a broken tone, “And now I must go, I know. You'll expect it of me, and *she'll* expect it, and they'll all look to it; and though I'll not know well where to go, and God knows if *he'll* send for me or let me know what's become of him, still I know I ought — and — and — I'll not ask for much time, and you'll be thinking I have my own independence from my mother; but — but — I've lent a good deal to Mr. Frere — and — if I could have a little time —”

Sir Douglas woke from some absorbed musing which had taken possession apparently of all his faculties, and said almost fiercely, “Alice, what are you talking of? Do you think I am made of such metal as to drive you forth, just as you are in most need of protection? Stay where you are — stay; but give me time to get over this.”

He rose as he spoke; leaning his clenched hand on the library table where they had been sitting; still looking down musingly, not seeing the objects there. Then he glanced upwards, doubtful whether to speak a word of better comfort, — to offer perhaps some soothing caress. But Alice was gone; softly gone through the half-

closed door, with cat-like gliding and gentleness; only just gone, for the long ends of the swan's-down boa she habitually crossed over her throat when about to traverse the cold stairs and corridors to her tower-room, were vanishing in the doorway, half creeping, half floating after her; looking as if they were a portion of her stealthy self.

Sir Douglas did not often — as the uneducated express it — “give way.” Passionate as he was by nature and temperament, he had a certain dignity which controlled in him the expression of all emotion. But when Alice was gone, he suddenly re-seated himself, and stretching his arms forward on the library table, he laid his head on them with a groan, and uttered a familiar name in a tone of startling agony. “Kenneth!” was all Sir Douglas said: but if Kenneth could have heard the tone in which his name was spoken, — the funereal *clang* of agony that went through the sound, — perhaps even to him, even to his most selfish nature, the sound might have conveyed a startling appeal.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LADY CHARLOTTE PERPLEXED.

BUT Kenneth was little troubled about other men's troubles. He was full of his own. That fire of thorns which he had chosen to light, the renewal of his passion for Gertrude, burnt with fierce and ceaseless heat: watched by Alice with sly and demure satisfaction, as sure to lead in some way (no matter how) to mischief and vexation for its object: watched with angry sneers by the Spanish she-grandee; who, though no longer herself in love with her husband, had that not uncommon spirit of jealousy which resents losing worship, with all its incense of small attentions, though careless of the worshipper: watched by Dowager Clochnaben, whenever her visits gave her fit opportunity, with grim scorn of Sir Douglas's blindness and his wife's abominable hypocrisy: watched even by poor little Lady Charlotte, in a sort of scared, frightened, questioning manner.

“He puts me so in mind, you know,” she rashly avowed to the Dowager, “of that pretty fable — no, not exactly fable, but heathen story, wasn't it; that dear Neil was reading out loud the other day after luncheon? — of a pagan; no, not a pagan, but a god of the pagans — Pluto it was, I remember, Pluto; and he came when she was quite innocently gathering poppies, and took

her away, whether she wished it or no: I forget the name of the goddess he took, but she did not want to go with him, he came upon her quite by surprise; and I happened to look up from my work at the time (I mean while Neil was reading about it) and dear Gertrude was embroidering a *portière* with crimson-flowers and white on a green ground, and all her worsted scattered about — so pretty she looked, and Kenneth had his eyes fixed on her in such a way — in such a way — and his head bent forwards, resting it on his hand, and all his dark curly hair streaking through his fingers as he rested it; and he looked exactly like Pluto: and only that of course such things can't happen *now* (indeed it would be very wrong to suppose they ever *did* really happen; a parcel of wicked heathen inventions, that nobody ought to believe), but I could not help thinking for a moment, that he was just the sort of man to behave that way, and I declare my fingers quite trembled as I went on again with my crochet, fancying to myself Gertrude picking poppies, with no one perhaps but myself within call, and Pluto coming — I mean Kenneth — and carrying her off! Indeed, he's very like a great many of those gods Neil reads about, and they all seem to have been as bad as bad could be.”

“Humph!” said the Dowager, with a grim curl of her upper lip, shadowed now with a slight fringe of stiff grey hairs. “Humph. There may be heathen stories, and modern stories, too, of that sort; but there's very little carrying off against your will, if you really wish to keep firm footing, that's my dictum.”

And with that gesture of firmness habitual to her, she planted her foot venomously on one especial rose in the Aubusson carpet (in the absence of her winter resource, the steel fender) with a precision and force that did indeed seem to defy Pluto and his four fiery-nostrilled steeds to remove her, unless by her own consent, one inch from that spot. Which sudden stamp, acting on the already excited nerves of poor Lady Charlotte, caused her to burst into tears.

The grim Dowager turned her lofty head, as if on a pivot, to contemplate for a moment her weeping friend, and when the little weak final snuffle in the embroidered and lace-bordered handkerchief seemed to bring the tears to a conclusion, and secure her a hearing, she delivered herself of the comforting sentence, — “Most women are fools; but I do think, Charlotte, that *you* are the greatest fool among them all; and

the greater the fool, the greater the folly, that's my dictum."

"But what can I do!" whimpered the submissive Lady Charlotte — "what can I do!"

"Nothing."

"But that's just what I do do! I daren't speak to Gertrude; and besides I feel so sure of her."

A snort was the Clochnaben's sole reply to this last observation — a snort of utter contempt.

"And what I think so very unfair, is the way he stays here, you know."

"Who?"

"Kenneth. He really stays on and on, and comes back, and stays on, and on, and on again, when nobody asks him! Now he's here for God knows how long, for he has put Torrieburn under thorough repair, as he says, and is making a wall and plantation to separate it entirely from the old Mills, and talks of letting it, and I don't know what else. It is quite heart-breaking!"

"I suppose if Lady Ross wanted him away, she could get rid of him."

"I don't believe she could! I don't in the least believe she could," said Lady Charlotte, eagerly, "or he'd have been gone long ago!"

"Well, I suppose Sir Douglas could get rid of him," said the Dowager, with another curl of the grim grey moustache.

"Perhaps! but you see he don't, and you see its suits Eusebia to stay, if she's obliged to be in Scotland at all, which she hates."

"If she hates Scotland, she doesn't hate Scotchmen, at all events," nodded the Clochnaben, maliciously, and the grey moustache stretched to a sort of smile.

"What do you mean? Oh, I know what you mean; I'm not quite so foolish as you think; I've seen —"

"Yes, and you *will* see; but, however, it's no business of *ours*."

Saying which, with a triumphant shake of her vestments, and a somewhat forcible adjusting of her gloves at the wrists, the Dowager ended her visit, and left Lady Charlotte to sigh alone.

"Why she should think me more foolish than herself, I don't know," was the somewhat wounded reflection of that gentler widow, "for after all I have observed just as much as she has — all Eusebia's goings on, and everything else."

Little Eusebia cared, who remarked her goings on. Indeed, she was in that humour

which, in old-fashioned phrase, used to be termed "flouting;" — a mood of mind sulk and defiance. She had fallen in love more with her half-forgotten admirer in early days, handsome Monzies of Craigievar, but their relative positions were a good deal altered. He was no longer the shy, proud Highland youth, with the first dawn of manhood on his lip, and the first passion for educated woman in his heart. Bearded, graceful, self-assured, having been a good deal flattered and caressed "even in London," liked by men, and much admired by women; with a sweet and courteous temper, and great power of adapting himself to whatever set he happened to be in; a first-rate shot, a first-rate reel-dancer, a first-rate curler, a first-rate angler, kind to a small scattered handful of tenantry; poor and not a whit ashamed of the fact, — he had won his way to a good many hearts both male and female.

He had his "melancholy story" too — a great thing with the softer sex. He had been married since the days he knew Eusebia; married for a year and a day, or more. Like the "Merry Bachelor" in Rückert's beautiful ballad, he had wept anguish over two locks of hair: one as white as long and glossy as ever was shed from beauty's head, and one a little piece of down, that might be hair or softened plumage, that lay curled up in the hair-ringlet, as the little dead head had laid the dead bosom of that "mother of a lament," after she had passed away.

Craigievar had been very gentle to his young wife, and very sorry for her loss. It was now five years since he had been widowed, and the elasticity of youth in life overbore each day more and more the cloud-dream of the past; but it had not made him still more interesting. From a philosophical point of view it is of course lamentable to consider that had he been stumpy, shallow, bleared-eyed widower, his grief would not have gained so much sympathy; but as it was, when he looked (and he was still melancholy at times) at the fair ladies who watched him, set it down to one sole cause. He might, it is true, only bored at that particular parting, extremely tired with "a good day's sport" or perhaps may have forgotten his own case; but they invariably decided that it was "thinking of his lost Mary," and it was quite amazing how many of her own were willing to console him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LOVE TROUBLES.

HERE, then, once more was Craigievar! And here was Eusebia, a beauty beginning fast to fade and harden, and much too shrewd and clever, and dependent on that beauty for her enjoyment of life, not to be quite aware of the fact. Restless, discontented, disappointed, gnawing her own heart at times for very wrath at her marriage, in which, as she considered, there had been so much deception as to Kenneth's position and fortune; and in which, as *he* considered, there had been yet greater deception as to her age, and certain circumstances which had caused demands for her hand in marriage to be so little pressed as to leave her still free, when he chanced to come to Granada to recover health and spirits after his fever in Spain.

Craigievar at first saw Eusebia with more curiosity than interest, as a woman he remembered to have once passionately admired. Then each thought of the other with that strange fictitious emotion — emotion at least which has nothing personally to do with the object that causes it — which most of us feel at sudden meetings with those who *date our lives*. Eusebia saw with a sudden rush the lake, the decorated hut, the early married days when as yet, though vain and coquettish with all, she still preferred Kenneth; and Craigievar the days when, still a youth and a bachelor, he had not laid his fair white rose of a wife in the grave, with her cold little bud beside her.

He saw with obvious tenderness pale little Effie, Eusebia's only child. He too had dreamed he was a father, and woke next morning alone. He thought more of Effie at first than of her mother. Then he perceived how unhappy and angry was the woman he remembered an exultant bride with her husband madly "in love" with her, and all London at her feet; and something kindlier stole in on his thoughts of her. But why count the steps of the ladder by which such thoughts climb into mist seeking better sunshine? Older than Kenneth, much older than Craigievar, Eusebia added to all her experience of life special experience of *men*, and the old empire was resumed, and the old songs sung, and boats went out on the lake to the hut and returned without Kenneth; and Kenneth not only was not missed but purposely eluded!

He took it strangely; he was stung, but

not jealous. Perhaps in his wild mood he rather wished she would "run away" from him. He was sick of her, of debt, of life, of everything but the thoughts of Gertrude. He could not trouble his head about his Spanish wife. Strange to say, the very calm that surrounded Gertrude had a charm for him. That calm, the very essence of which was home, and peace and purity — that calm which, if it were within the bounds of possibility he should ever be listened to, must depart for ever!

Gertrude meanwhile struggled with a certain feeling of embarrassment in his presence. She cast about how, as Lady Clochnabon had expressed it, to "get rid of him" without dealing too harshly by a half-ruined man; she had become fully aware of, and alarmed by, the indiscretion (if it were nothing more) of Eusebia's conduct. Once — once only — tenderly and timidly, she had attempted to warn her. They had been such friends! She had been so fond of Eusebia!

They were in the dressing-room of the latter: who had come in late from the lake with Craigievar, and had been making a toilette more hurried than was her wont. She was clasping in one of her earrings while Gertrude spoke; she turned, still clasping it, with one of those sudden graceful movements, that tossed her veils and fringes round her like dark billows — a demon Venus rising from inky waves. Her beautiful flashing eyes fixed on the speaker full in the face; a scornful smile trembled on her short upper lip, and showed the still white and even teeth beneath: her cheeks alone looked a little haggard and fallen under the crimson rouge. She laughed.

"Ha! *you take my husband!* you want now perhaps to take my *adornateur*, my *amigo!* Be content with your portion! Do not trouble me. I have already enough sore in my heart."

And as the long pendant clasped with a snap, she made another rapid volte-face to her mirror, and ceased to speak, contemplating fixedly her own image, with something of sadness mixed with her fierceness that gradually vanished, and left her looking — as she intended to look when they should go down-stairs to dinner.

Gertrude almost shuddered as she took Kenneth's arm that day to pass to that familiar meal, and started more than once when addressed by others. She was ruminating how "to get rid of him." And how also to get rid of — Eusebia, and the fearful future that seemed to threaten for both!

That night Kenneth wrote to Gertrude, — as wild a letter as ever was written by an unprincipled man to a woman he was enamoured of. To say the woman he “loved” would be to profane the word.

And Gertrude answered him. She alluded boldly and clearly to all the past. She inclosed a copy of the little note of farewell which Lorimer Boyd had taken to him when it was agreed he should leave Naples. She spoke of the faith sworn to her husband at the altar; and even if such vows had never existed, of her unalterable, passionate, adoring love for his uncle. In conclusion came a prayer to halt and consider, to save himself and Eusebia from certain misery; and the information that she intended to go to Edinburgh the following day, and remain there a night, hoping he would see the decency, the necessity of withdrawing from Glenrossie before her return, no longer mocking the hospitality he received, or paining her by his presence.

Otherwise the day must come — must come when she should confess this torment to her husband, to her Douglas faithful and true, and cast herself on his counsel only, having done her best through grief and pain to avoid making any breach between him and his uncle, and finding all in vain.

She could not trust such a letter to indifferent hands. She gave it to him as they passed from the breakfast-room. The carriage was already waiting to take her away. As Sir Douglas handed her in, he said with wistful anxiety, “I am afraid your chief business in Edinburgh is to see Doctor R——. You have been looking so ill lately.”

Gertrude wrung the tender hand she held, and tried to smile her farewell. Her boy Neil stood beside her husband, his father’s hand on his sturdy shoulder, smiling with radiant young eyes in the morning sun.

“God bless them both, and send me peace with them once more,” was Gertrude’s prayer, as she leaned back wearily in the carriage the long fir-branches from time to time sweeping against its roof, and dropping a stray cone here and there by the road that led through the noble avenue.

Glenrossie! dear Glenrossie! dear home and perfect mate! Dear, handsome boy, so like her one love of life — her unequalled Douglas! God bless them, and send her peace. Amen.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ALICE MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES.

WHAT were Alice’s green-gray eyes made for, if not to watch? Does not the cat sit apparently watching for ever? — watching for what we know not. Even where there is no chance of mousing, in the broad day, do we not see her with fixed attention in her half-closed, diamond-shaped orbits, scanning things afar off, near at hand, above and below, ready to pounce on a leaf that flutters down from a tree, a ball of worsted that rolls from old nurse’s lap, the tail of a boy’s broken kite, or a young bird fallen from the nest in too easy essay of its callow wings: ready to pounce, ever on the watch? So also was Alice.

All had their plans for that day. Kenneth had hoped — had meant — to see Gertrude. Sir Douglas had made up his mind to speak to his nephew, and urge him to return to Spain. Eusebia intended to spend the day at the Hut (not unaccompanied); and Alice herself was preparing a little basket of provisions for a blind and dying beggar lodged in a cabin between Glenrossie and Clochnaben, recommended to her by the clergyman who had been called to administer the offices of religion and what help he could afford.

But Alice had an instinct that something had occurred more than common. She had seen Kenneth give his letter after dinner: she saw Gertrude give the reply after breakfast. While Gertrude was departing, she saw Kenneth step out on the terrace from the breakfast-room, and turn towards the shrubbery, reading as he went. She saw him stop — tear the letter with his teeth, stamp it into the earth, and give way to the wildest gesticulations. She saw Sir Douglas return from putting Gertrude into the carriage, and cross the lawn as if to speak to Kenneth. She saw the latter advance to meet him casting one hurried look behind where he had crushed the letter with his foot. Swiftly, noiselessly, she descended also to the garden. She was in time to hear Sir Douglas say, “Kenneth, I wish to speak with you;” and to hear the latter reply, “Not now, I can’t; I am going down to Torrieburn: meet me there; I must be there by noon.” She was in time, though Kenneth turned quickly after he had seen Sir Douglas re-enter the house, to scramble together the torn papers he had ground down with his heel, and one fluttering bit that was rustling along the hedge of holly, and beat a rapid retreat with that

treasure-trove in her hand. She saw Kenneth return to the spot, search, look up as though he thought the wind might have carried the fragments away, pick off the holly-hedge just such another morsel as that she held, and tear into smaller pieces, which he scattered on the air, and then, pale and moody, turn to the house. She locked herself into her turret-chamber and read with greedy eyes that seemed to eat the very words. She looked from that high window, and saw both Kenneth and Sir Douglas, at different intervals, take the direction of Torrieburn, and little sturdy Neil go forth with his own dog and gun, and the careful old keeper.

Glenrossie was empty of its inhabitants. She too could go out: could go and see the blind and dying man. Yes, but first she would see — would ascertain — would pay a little visit of inspection nearer home.

She was going to Gertrude's bright morning-room.

It was very bright and still. There was no chance of interruption. Gertrude's maid had accompanied her lady; so had Lady Charlotte; but even had there been such a chance, Alice would have easily found some plausible excuse. Was she not working the corresponding *portière* to that which suggested such visions of Pluto's bad conduct to Gertrude's mother?

With gleaming, half-shut eyes, she scanned all the objects round, and rested them at last on a little French *escritoire*, set with *plaques* of old Sévres china. It was locked — but what was that to Alice? She had a great variety of keys; and French *escrittoires* are not protected by either Chubb's or Bramah's. Nor was she trying this lock for the first time — though beyond reading Lorimer's account of Mr. Frere, she had never hitherto found anything to reward her trouble in opening it. Now she felt sure she would be more fortunate. And the event proved the correctness of her expectations. The papers had been somewhat hastily thrust back the night before and peeping out from the half-doubled blotting-book, as though absolutely offering itself for inspection, was the insolent, wild, loving letter of Kenneth's, and the rough copy (if rough copy that can be called which had so few verbal corrections, and so completely conveyed the sentiments of the writer) of the torn and gravel-stained answer, with which his blind rage had dealt so hardly in the garden.

Alice nearly danced for joy! She laid the paper flat, compared it with the other, and gave little strange, triumphant pats to

its outspread surface. Then she sat long, in mute, half-frowning, half-scanning consideration; and then she jumped up with a suddenness that Eusebia herself could scarcely have rivalled, and crushed all the paper together in her hands with a wild laugh. Then once more she smoothed them out, rolled them neatly together, shut the *escritoire*, made a mocking curtsy to the empty chair in which Gertrude habitually sat; said aloud, in a mocking voice "Adieu, milady!" and left the morning-room once more to its bright silence unbroken to-day, even by the boom of the bee, or the outside twitter of the birds; the windows being all closed, and everything marking the absence of that sweet mistress whose happiest hours were passed there.

Then Alice went forth on her mission of charity, and visited the dying beggar. Her visit was prolonged till the day began to wane, for death at times seemed very near. When the clergyman arrived, Alice was still there, and the man had rallied. He spoke feebly of trying to reach his native village, and of dying there. Alice rose and prepared to leave him. "I will come again if I can to-morrow," she said, in her quiet one; and looking up in the clergyman's face, as she rolled some papers together, "I have been reading him something I copied," she said, "I thank you for sending to me about him."

With those words, and a little gentle bow, and tranquil shake of the hand to the minister, she departed, leaving that good old successor of Mr. Heaton gazing after her slender figure with unmixed approbation of her conduct.

"But, indeed, it's not to be marvelled at, in a sister of gude Sir Douglas," was his half-uttered sentence, as he turned back into the dim cabin, and sat down by the box-bed, in the groping depths of which lay the sick man.

The little light that entered from the open door gleamed rather on the framework of the bed, than on the bed itself; except on the outer edge, where, white and blanched, on the ragged, green tartan quilt, lay the helpless and attenuated hand of the sufferer.

The good minister lifted that hand with some kindly, encouraging word; as he did so, he remarked a deep indented scar beyond the knuckles. "Ye'll have been hurt there, some time, *puir bodie*," he observed, compassionately.

The sick man moaned, and answered faintly, "We'll no murmur at trouble the Lord sends. I was chased in Edinburgh by some laddies, and when I was nigh fallin', I

caught by a railing, and the spike just wan' into me! It was a sair hurt; but I've had mony blessings, tho' I'm cauld now to my very marrow."

And so saying, the blind man slowly and tremblingly drew in his hand, under the dark tartan coverlid, and lay still and apparently exhausted.

CAPTER XLIX.

A SCENE WITH KENNETH.

SIR DOUGLAS had made up his mind after long reveries, that Kenneth should leave Glenrossie. Gertrude had not spoken to him on the subject. He dared scarcely argue the matter openly to his own soul, far less to her, but he was not the less resolved.

They met then at Torrieburn. Kenneth had shot some birds on his way, and was carrying his gun with a listless, gloomy brow, as if there were no pleasure left in that or anything else for him. He had also obviously taken repeated draughts from the flask of whisky, he carried at his belt; and the dull glare which Sir Douglas loathed to see in his eyes was already perceptible there, though it was a little past noon.

They sat down on some felled timber, and Sir Douglas went straight to his point.

"Kenneth," he said, "I have resolved to speak to you about leaving Glenrossie. A great deal has come to my knowledge since first you and Eusebia made your home with us, which, had I known it at first would perhaps have prevented my ever proposing to you to come."

Kenneth drew a long draught from the whisky-flask, and, in a thick angry voice, he muttered, "Has Gertrude — has your wife — been complaining of me to you?"

"No, she has always taken your part — always endeavored to explain away or conceal differences between you and Eusebia, as well as those events which — which perhaps — and here Sir Douglas hesitated, "which, most assuredly, I had better have known at the time they took place."

Again Kenneth had recourse to the flask, and said, with a bitter laugh, "It was not I, at least, who kept you in ignorance of them."

Sir Douglas felt the blood flush to his temples; he strove to be calm.

"No, Kenneth; it was not you. I cannot doubt, however, that they were kept from me for a good motive. We cannot undo the past; what I have to think of is the future.

It is repugnant to me to live with you on other terms than those of the most loving cordiality and freedom from restraint. That cordiality — that free affection — Sir Douglas's voice broke a little — "cannot exist as it did — It may return, Kenneth — God grant it may! — but feeling as I do, and knowing what I do, there is change enough to make me wish for a further change, and that is" —

"Pray go on, my dear uncle, go on, fellow! Don't mind me!"

Kenneth was rapidly becoming more and more intoxicated.

"That change is that we shall part, Kenneth, at all events for the present. I have loved you, in spite of all your faults; I have endeavored to assist you to the last, in spite of all your imprudences; but I will not live with you in the same home, because" —

"Don't it, speak out, and say you want to part me and Gertrude, and have done with it. Afraid of me, eh? a little late in the day, uncle, a little late" —

A drunken, hollow laugh followed his speech.

Sir Douglas rose, trembling with suppressed passion.

"Kenneth," he said, "do not break the links that bind us together. However trifling habitual excess may make you imperfect, however little place love, and — I will not call it gratitude — love and memory, what we have been to each other may live in your heart, respect the purity of our respect the spotless name of my wife. Better men than you have loved in vain, borne it, and stood faithfully by a woman's choice. Parted!" continued he, almost as vehemently as Kenneth himself: "we were parted before we ever were united. Parted, boy! Gertrude and I are one, and you part now with us both. Whenever the day come in your perverse heart, you can reason and repent."

So sternly — in all their many discussions — had loving Sir Douglas never spoken to his nephew before. Never to that quiet and indulgent idol!

It maddened Kenneth. What little reasoning power increasing irritation and increasing intoxication had left him, he sought to forsake his brain in a flash of boiling. He looked up, cowering and frenzied, from the felled tree where he stood to the stately form with folded arms and dignant commanding countenance before him. He leaned one arm on the branch to steady himself, and another swaying from side to side, speaking hurriedly, with an idiot's laugh at

idiot's fierceness. "Pure," he said, "pure! Oh yes, pure and spotless; they are all pure and spotless till they're found out! I loved in vain, did I? Talk of my vanity: what is my vanity to yours, you old coxcomb? Parted! You can't part us. I told you at Naples, and I tell you now, that she loved me — me — me! and nothing but fear holds her to you. I'll stay here, if it's only to breathe the same air. Parted! Part from her yourself — tyrant and traitor! Part from her for ever, and be sure if I don't marry your widow, no other man shall!

He staggered suddenly to his feet, levelled his gun full at Sir Douglas as he stood, and fired.

In the very act he stumbled, and fell on one knee; the charge went low and slanted: part of it struck Sir Douglas on the left hand, and drew blood.

The shock seemed to sober Kenneth for a moment. A gloomy sort of horror spread over his face. Then the idiot laugh returned.

"I haven't, haven't killed you. You're winged though, winged! Stand back! Don't tempt me," added he, with returning ferocity.

Sir Douglas lifted the gun and flung it out of reach: then he spoke, binding his handkerchief round his hand.

"You have not killed me. Go home, and thank God for that. You have not made my son suddenly an orphan — as you were when first I took you to my heart. Oh! my boy, my Kenneth! what demon spell is on your life? Pray to God! PRAY!" and with the last broken words, a bitter cry, ending almost in an agonised sob, went up to heaven, and resounded in the dull ear of the drunken man. Many a day afterwards, and many a night in dreams, Kenneth saw that pale, sorrowful, commanding face, and the stately form erect over his grovelling drunkenness, as he held by the branch of the felled pine, vainly trying to steady himself and rise from the half-kneeling, half-leaning posture into which he had fallen. Many a lonely day in the sigh of the wind in those Scottish woods, he heard again the echo of that "exceeding bitter cry," wrung from the anguish of a noble soul, and making vain appeal to his better nature.

God gives us moments in our lives when all might change. If he could have repented then! If he could have repented!

Many a day he thought of it when Sir Douglas was no longer there, and he could see his face no more.

There was a dreary pause after that burst of anguish, and then Sir Douglas spoke again.

"Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. When I can think further of this day, and more calmly, you shall hear from me. Farewell Kenneth!

The stately vision seemed to hold its hand out in token of amicable parting, as Kenneth raised his bloodshot, stupefied eyes. He did not take the hand; it seemed too far off, reaching from some better world. He crouched down again, laying his head prone with hidden face on the rough resinous bark of the lopped tree. Something for a moment pressed gently on the tangled curls of his burning head, and passed away and left only the breath of heaven waving through them; and as it passed, a sound, as of a heavy human sigh, melted also on his ear.

A fancy haunted Kenneth that the hand of Sir Douglas had laid for that moment on his head, as it had laid many a day in his boyhood and youth, and that the sigh was his also. But these might be but dreams.

All that was real, was the utter loneliness, — when, after a long drunken slumber, he woke and saw the sun declining, and heard the distant music of Torrieburn Falls, monotonously sweet — and the clear song of the wooing thrush, — and looked languidly towards the house of Torrieburn, with its half-hidden gables, gleaming through the trees; and the words came back to him clearly and distinctly, "Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. Farewell, Kenneth?"

Was it all a black dream? A black, drunken, delirious dream?

No.

Somehow, suddenly Kenneth thought of his mother. For a man knows, if no one else on earth pities him, his MOTHER pities still!

The drunken head bowed once more over the fallen tree, and half-murmured the word, "Poor Maggie!" What easy showers of kisses and tears would have answered, if she had known it! But Maggie was away, — "ayont the hills," — swelling with her own share of sorrowful indignation at Kenneth's conduct, and trying vainly to reconcile the old miller and his rheumatic wife to their new abode.

"Cauld and strange!" "Cauld and strange!" was all that rewarded her efforts.

CHAPTER L.

ALICE IMPARTS HER DISCOVERIES.

THE next day was the Sabbath. Peace shone from the clear autumn sky, and glorified the common things of earth. Birds sang, flowers opened wide, streamlets and falls seemed to dance, as they rippled and rolled in the light. The freshness of the morning was over the cultured fields; the freshness of the morning was over the barren moor; the freshness of the morning sparkled in the dewy glen. Neil had promised his old nurse to "step into her sheiling," his mother being absent, and go with her to church; for which the old woman was already pinning on her snowy cap, and best shawl, and smiling, not at herself, but at a vision of Niel, in her glass.

Alice asked sadly and demurely, and very anxiously, if she might walk with her half-brother, and if he would mind setting out half an hour "too soon," as she had something very particular to say to him. Sir Douglas consented. They walked in utter silence great part of the way, as far as the "broomy knowe," where Alice had first talked with him of "kith-and-kin love." There they halted, and there they sat down, there she reminded him of that day! There—in a sort of frightened, subdued whispering voice—Alice said, "I know well that since that day I myself have forfeited much of my claim to brother's love, though it seems to me even now that I love you better than all—ay, even better than *my dream* of wedded love! But whether I have forfeited or not, I feel cannot bear others should deceive you; and I've brought to this place what must be shown, though it wring my heart in the showing, and yours in the reading. It's all I can do, in return for your mercy and indulgence to me. All I can do in return is to prevent your being deceived by others! God knows what we are all made of! I've not had an hour's peace since I picked this up. Kenneth trampled it under foot just as you went to speak with him yesterday morning; and I was out gathering flowers; and then I thought it looked so unseemly in the garden-ground; and then as I gathered it up I saw—I could not help seeing—some strange words; and at last—at last—oh! Douglas, do not have any anger with me!—nor much with her; for it's my belief there is witchcraft round her, and none can help loving her that sees her."

Sir Douglas looked strangely into Alice's eyes as she handed him the gravel-soiled, earth-stained papers. It was Gertrude's

writing; of that there could be no doubt And what was not Gertrude's was Kenneth's.

Oh, God of mercy, what was to come to-day, after that yesterday of pain?

Sir Douglas lifted his bonnet from his brow and looked up to the serene heaven before him. "Thy will be done. THY will be done," said the trembling human lips. And hard was the struggle to echo the words in the shuddering human heart.

Much has been said and written of the tortures of the Inquisition, and the cruelty of those who look on and yet not show mercy. But what are physical tortures to tortures of the mind? What "grand Inquisitor" ever looked on with more stony indifference to unendurable suffering than Alice Ross as she watched the flush of colour rise to cheek and temple—fade to ghastly paleness—and big drops stand on the marble brow; while the breath of life seemed to pant and quicken as if suffocation would follow.

Even she started at the long moan which burst from that over-charged bosom, as her half-brother closed his eyes and leaned back on the bank.

He had read it all. ALL.

Not in vain had Alice Ross paid her long visit to the blind beggar with the indented scar on his thin right hand. Not for the first time—no nor for the hundredth—was that hand exercising its unequalled skill at imitation and forgery; nor that apt and tortuous brain devising schemes of ruin or vengeance on those who had offended.

The passionately torn letter, gravel-stained and soiled, had apparently its corresponding half, also gravel-stained and soiled (and carefully had Alice's light heel and clever hand sought the very spot where Kenneth's mad passion had ground it into the earth in the morning.) But the half that corresponded in form, altered the whole sense of the letter. The sentences referring to her love for Sir Douglas were apparently addressed to Kenneth. Her notice that she would be in Edinburgh read like an appointment to him to meet her there. Her allusions to the necessity—"if all this torment continued"—of confession to her husband, barely escaped the sense that she had to make confession of a return of his unlawful passion. The letter only stopped short at a clear implication of sin. Perhaps even the two bold accomplices employed in its concoction felt that on *that* hinge the door of possible credence would cease to open. All was left in doubt and mystery. Except that to that bold avowal of guilty love an answer

had been secretly delivered, conveying all the encouragement it was possible to give : referring to the old day of Naples ; to the little note of adieu, telling him they were parting "for a time, not for ever," that it was better for him, for her, for *all*."

The passage that hoped he "would see the decency, the necessity, of withdrawing from Glenrossie," was a little fragment wanting in the torn sheet.

No one could read the letter and still think Gertrude a true and holy-hearted wife ; though those who choose to give her "the benefit of the doubt," might believe sin only imminent, not yet accomplished.

The part that was forged was not more stained or spoiled than the portion which was no forgery. Every word fitted naturally in every sentence. If ever human being held what looked like proof incontrovertible leading to miserable conviction, Sir Douglas held it that day, as he sat on the wild, fair hill with all the peace and beauty of nature spread around him.

He rose at length, and held his right hand out to Alice ; his left was bandaged and in pain. She put her slender fingers forward to meet his touch, and felt the icy dampness that speaks of faintness at the heart. He cleared his throat twice before speaking, and then said with an effort : "I believe you have done right. Be satisfied that you have done right : it was a duty not to let me remain in ignorance."

Then he stood still and looked wistfully out on the lovely scenery, the lake below, the hills above, the grim rocks of Clochnaben, the valley where smiled Glenrossie, the speck of white light that denoted where lay the Hut, with a still tinier spark of scarlet reflected from the flag, set up on the days they meant to visit it.

"Fair no more ! pleasant never, never again !" he murmured to himself, as he gazed ; then he turned slowly to Alice.

"We must go on to church. Say nothing of all this to any fellow-creature. Be as usual ; I shall, I trust, be as usual. This is the battle of LIFE."

At the gate of the churchyard were the usual groups of men, women, and children uncovered, greeting with smiles and respectful curtsies their beloved chieftain and landlord. In general he had a kind word or sentence for each and all. He tried twice, but his voice faltered, for they inquired in return after "her Leddyskip at the Castle," and the answer choked in his throat.

His boy Neil turned into the gate, holding the old nurse by the hand, and carry-

ing her huge brown leather psalm book, wrapped in a clean white cotton pocket-handkerchief. Neil gave it gently into her withered grasp, with a kindly pat on her shoulder, and turned to accompany his father to their usual seat. Sir Douglas passed onwards as in a dream, his face was very pale.

"Papa's hand, that he hurt yesterday, seems to pain him very much," Neil whispered to Alice. She nodded demurely without speaking. It was not right to speak in church. Neil ought to know that.

Sir Douglas sat very pale, still, and stately by the side of his handsome little son, and many a kindly glance wandered to the pew when the boy's full, sweet, and strong voice rose to join the psalmody. The young laird was the idol of Sir Douglas's tenantry. "He was just what auld Sir Douglas himsel' had bin ; a thoct stouter, may be, but just the varry moral o' him."

So the service went on, till all of a sudden Sir Douglas gave a deep audible groan. They were reading the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and had come to the nineteenth verse : — "Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily."

Young Neil started at the groan, and clasping his father's hand in his own, looked anxiously up in his face, and half rose from his seat, as though expecting him to leave the church from illness. But Sir Douglas sat still, his eyes steadily fixed on the minister.

It is strange that women who have been falsely accused, never think of drawing consolation from the fact that the holiest of all women whose lives are recorded, the one woman who was permitted to be as it were the link between earth and heaven, according to the transmitted history of the Christian religion, had to endure her share of earthly shame. Nor only that, but that a lesson as to the fallibility of all human judgment lies wrapped in the written account of the conduct of her husband Joseph. He was a "just" man. A good man, merciful, affectionate, anxious to do that which was right in the sight of God ; anxious to bear himself fitly and with all indulgence to his neighbor. But his human mercy extended only to "putting her away privily." He would not put her to public shame, though his own trust was broken. That was the sum of all, till the angelic vision made all clear.

As Sir Douglas listened, he also leaned to the side of that incomparable mercy which would spare shame. He knelt a little longer in final prayer than usual, before he passed out into the sunshine and greeted the assembled groups with a degree less of abstraction, still holding Neil by the hand.

Arrived at Glenrossie, he shut himself up in the library and wrote.

His letter was not long. It was addressed to Gertrude, and enclosed the gravel-stained papers which Alice had given him. He wrote the address and sealed it, with a firm unshrinking hand; but long he sat and gazed at it after it was written, as if in a painful trance; and when he rose from the table where he had been writing, he felt as though threatened with paralysis, and stood a moment holding by the brass-bound table, fearing he might fall.

Then he passed to his own dressing-room, and sent for Neil.

"Neil, my boy," he said, "I am going to London; I am in great pain." He paused, unable to proceed.

"My dearest father! yes; I can see you are in pain. You will have some surgeon? How did you do it? how *could* you get hurt?" And the innocent boy stooped with his eyes full of tears, and kissed, with

a tender little kiss, the bandage over the wounded hand.

"I may be away more days than you expect, dear Neil. You will do all as if I were here — lessons: conduct: care in shooting: all — won't you?"

"I will, father; I will. Trust me, father. You can trust me, can't you?" and the boy smiled, with his sweet candid eyes full upon his father's face.

"Yes — yes! Oh God! let me trust you, my son, if I never again trust any other human being!"

And to the consternation of Neil, Sir Douglas flung his arms round his son's neck and sobbed like a child. In the morning while dawn was yet breaking and Neil yet wrapped in happy boyish slumbers, rapid wheels once more sounded soft along the great fir-avenue; the carriages, feathery branches that had bent over Gertrude's departure the previous day, braced over the roof of the carriage that now bore her husband from home. The squares leaped and scampered up the brown sods and the scattering cones fell to the earth and lay on the dewy grass in silence.

Great was the silence in Glenrossie that day: the master had departed.

CHAPTER LI.

GERTRUDE THINKS HERSELF SUPERIOR
TO SIR DOUGLAS.

THERE is a grievous moment in the lives of many who love humbly and sincerely, and think little of themselves; a moment of strange contradiction of all the previous impressions of that love; a dethroning, as it were, of its object. No longer better, wiser, greater than all other mortal creatures: no longer the infallible guide, the crown and glory of life; loved still, but loved in a different way. Something of splendour departed, we know not where: something of security vanished, we know not why: such is the change that comes at such times. It comes to men in the first consciousness of their over-estimation of some fair syren whose song has only lured them to the rocks and shoals of existence. It comes to women whose love has bordered on adoration, when they feel compelled to mingle *pity* with the regard they bestow on their husbands.

When Gertrude read—with strained and amazed eyes—the letter put into her hands that morning, she pressed her lips to the signature with the kiss of passionate pity one bestows on a wounded child.

“Oh my poor Douglas! my husband!” was all she said. But in that one brief grieving sentence, they seemed to change positions forever. He stood lower: she stood higher. Never could *she* have been so deceived! Never, though all the stars in heaven had seemed to shed their light on the deception, could *she* have accepted as against him the wretched forgery of proof he had accepted against *her*. Never!

Poor Douglas! Ay, poor indeed. Begared of trust and hope, and belief in human nature; for if he doubted *her*, in whom could he believe?

The sick pang at her heart increased. She rang, and ordered preparations for instant departure; and then she once more sat down to re-read the strange lines penned by that familiar hand. That hand which had clasped hers at the altar; which had detained her with its warm, gentle, almost trembling grasp, when first they stood together on the threshold of her new home at Glenrossie; detained her that he might murmur in her ear, before she entered, his hope that she would be always happy there; his wife, his own for evermore.

She was a girl then. She was a young matron now. If it was not for her hand-

some schoolboy, Neil, the years had flown so swiftly that it might seem but yesterday she blushed through that bridal hour of love, and heard that welcome HOME; that blessed sentence, spoken in music, since spoken by *his* voice.

And now, what had he written? How could he write so? Poor Douglas?

“Gertrude,” the letter said, “I am spared at least the anguish of explanation, by being enabled to enclose you these papers. Your own letter and” (there was a blur here, as though the name “Kenneth” had been begun and effaced) “*my nephew's*.”

“I endeavour to do you justice, and believe that his conduct at Naples and many combining circumstances, made you think it best to reject him,—and accept me.

“I feel certain that no worldly calculations mingled with the arguments of others, or your own thoughts, when you so decided.

“You could not then perhaps test the strength or weakness of your heart. You mated your youth with my age: a gap of long years stretched between us!

“I have the least time remaining to suffer from the remembrance of my bitter loss.

“Whether my life of loneliness to come, shall be longer than I could desire, or brief as I wish, you will see me no more. I shall endeavour to devote myself to the service of my country, as in earlier days.

Not in unmanly despair, but in submission to God, I trust to spend what measure of the future He may allot me.

“For you—you know me too well to doubt my desire that all this should pass without open scandal; and without that bitterness which assumes a right of vengeance for irreparable wrong.

“I am gone. I will not part you from your son. I have seen what that suffering is in other women; that tearing out of the heart by the roots. You will doubtless be much with your mother; but when Neil's holidays come, you will meet him at Glenrossie, and remain with him there. I shall see him—but not now. I make no condition; except that you avoid all explanation with him. Let him—at least in this his happy boyhood—know me *absent*, not *parted*, from home ties. Let all around you think the same.

“I have hesitated to add anything respecting the *cause* of our separation. I will only say that it is a dreary satisfaction to me to believe that, seeing what your first step towards sin has brought about, you will never take a second.

"In leaving you Neil, I leave a hostage against all possibility of actual dishonour."
"DOUGLAS ROSS."

CHAPTER LII.

ON WINGS OF HOPE, A JOURNEY.

Then followed a very few hurried lines, apparently written after the letter was concluded; the ink paler, the sentence blotted immediately after writing.

"Gertrude—I find it impossible to close this letter,—my last letter to my wife,—and not say"—

There the lines ended that were decipherable! Pore over them, and turn them which way she would, she could not make out more than the two words "selfish love." Selfish? was it his, was it Kenneth's? Was he relenting to her, even while he sealed her sentence of exile from his heart? Was there LOVE in those blurred lines? love of which she was cheated, by their being so defaced? Or had some phrase of warning,—too severe, in his merciful view of her case,—occupied that last fraction of the fair white sheet of paper, so full of suppressed accusation and stifled regrets?

It was with a shudder that Gertrude thought of Kenneth, and gazed once more at his mad letter. Gazed, too, at the answer, so ingeniously fitted in with its mosaic of forgery! She could not doubt who had betrayed her to this misery. Alice! Alice, and (if it were possible to believe he were again within hail) James Frere! He had been convicted of forgery. He had etched and imitated for Dowager Lady Clochnabon in the early days of their intimacy, with a skill which had been the marvel of all who beheld it. She did not for one moment doubt what had happened: and, strange to say, the more she thought of it, the less miserable she felt. It was all so transparently clear. She had only to get to Douglas—(poor Douglas!)—and explain it, and say, "Half of this letter is indeed mine, but the other half is a forgery; how could you believe in it?" and then—then—she would be happier than ever! Happy, with the weight off her heart of all past partial concealments (all attempted for his sake—his own dear sake,—to save him pain); happy, with the embarrassment of Kenneth's presence removed for good; happy, alone in the lovely home of Glenrossie with her husband; without Alice,—cruel, cunning, cat-like Alice. Only her husband, and her boy, and mother, and true friends.

EAGER, almost elate, dying to be in Douglas's presence, in his kindly domestic arms, Gertrude tied her bonnet-strings hurriedly, trembling fingers; and telling her maid that very important business had called Sir Douglas to London, and that she was to follow him with Lady Charlotte, she that shrewd abigail to Glenrossie with a message, and continued her preparation without a word to her mother of the careful letter, only that "important business" called them to town; and with an effrontery, which even to that simple and parent, seemed strange and hysterical.

Then she suddenly bethought her of a proof—the easy proof of forgery, which lay in her desk at Glenrossie, the rough copy of her letter to Kenneth—she meant, indeed, for a rough copy, but she set aside after writing it, as containing passages, reasonings with him, which were well omitted. She must get that letter. The delay of getting that must be her excuse, and then she would set out for their London house, and see her husband. Lady Charlotte might wait for her in Edinburgh; it was needless fatigue for that fragile traveller to go to Glenrossie and back; Gertrude could go alone.

She did go alone. Pale and excited, she passed by the good old butler, who was already settled in his own mind that she looked "no canny" in his master's departure. She asked for Neil as her attendant, and was told he was out with the keeper; then, swift and noiseless as a cat, she reached the door of her own morning-room and opened it wide. It was already occupied.

There in the sunshine—witch-like and spiteful—smiling a smile such as never to wreath woman's lips, sat Alice Ross, curled up and lounging on the ottoman, Kenneth's favourite resort. She did not immediately perceive Gertrude; she was smiling that evil smile at the maid who stood in her shawl and bonnet, who had arrived, nervously pinning and adjusting her large pebble brooch, and looking down at Miss Ross, who had just finished a sentence of which the word "packing" was all that reached Gertrude's ear.

The maid uttered an exclamation of surprise at her lady, and curtsied; and Alice, called into attention, rose, or rather sprang, with feline activity from her feline seat of repose.

The pale mistress of Glenrossie Castle looked steadily at her false sister-in-law, on whose lips the odd smile still flickered with a baleful light, and who, having risen, continued mutely standing, neither bidding good-morrow, nor otherwise acknowledging her presence.

"This is *my* room," said Lady Ross, as, unable to restrain her impatience to possess herself of her letter, she advanced to the escritoire.

The proud sentence of dismissal changed Alice's smile to a little audible laugh.

"True, but ye were not expected here," she said; with slow Scotch emphasis on the "*not*."

Then, as Gertrude feverishly searched, and searched in vain, for the purloined paper, and turned at last (paler than ever) to conscious "Ailie," — convinced through whose misdoing it was no longer there — the half-sister of Sir Douglas with mocking bitterness added, —

"Kenneth's off for Edinburgh, like other folk. It's hard to be parted from what one loves."

There was a world of emphasis in the creature's last slow sentence.

"God forgive you, Alice Ross," said Gertrude; "Douglas never will, when he knows all."

"That will be very unchristian," said the unperturbed and unperturbable Ailie. And with a repetition of the audible little laugh, she tossed the ends of her boa together, and glided out of the room, and was down the corridor and up the stair and away to her own tower chamber, before the heavy shivering sigh from Gertrude's heart had died away into silence.

It was perhaps with a wistful excuse for the great and honest anxiety which weighed on his mind, that the old butler came to the door and knocked, though it stood still half open, inquiring doubtfully whether her "Leddyskip" would not take some refreshment after her journey.

Gertrude did not at first hear or heed him. She stood with her eyes fixed on the escritoire, and murmured to herself half aloud, "Oh! what shall I do?"

"Trust in God," said the old servant.

He had seen three generations now of this house, and considered himself as much a part of it as the very trees on whose rough branches, when Sir Douglas and Kenneth were boys, their cold step-mother had hung the two dogs.

Trust in God.

Then Gertrude looked up, and said gent-

ly, rather absently, "I am going to London. Tell Neil when he comes in."

"When will ye be back, my Leddy?"

The question nearly broke down her resolve to seem calm. She faltered out the words, "I expect we shall be back in a couple of days or so."

Wz. The old man looked doubtfully and compassionately at her, and left the apartment. After a minute's pause Gertrude left it also. She looked back as she quitted it. That lovely room, with all its chosen treasures!

The sentence that spoke of her coming to it only as a visitor — that sentence in Sir Douglas's letter which bid her "meet Neil at Glenrossie during his holidays" — rose in her mind with special force. She chased it away, and smiled — a quivering, tender smile. Soon she would see that dear husband, and convince him! Soon all would be well again. They would yet chat and laugh together, by winter hearth and summer sunshine, in that room!

Eyes followed her as she departed: of keen, watchful Alice, peering from her tower; the eyes, faded, wrinkled, and kindly, of the aged butler, who had seen Old Sir Douglas a cradled child! The eyes of her maid, who, neither better nor worse than others of her class, had been listening to all sorts of malevolent gossip and evil prophecy from Alice Ross, and had been prepared for thorough belief in that gossip, by inspection of Sir Douglas's letter before it even reached her lady's hand. For they all had an instinct that something unusual was going on. Why should Sir Douglas write, when in an hour or two her mistress would be home? Why should Lady Ross herself sit half the night before she went to Edinburgh, writing, and forgetting to undress — though her weary maid coughed and sighed, to remind her that she was waiting in the ante-room, the candles burning low, and yawns becoming more and more frequent? Why?

"Sir Douglas and milady were certainly going to part, only milady didn't wish it, because of her reputation; Mr. Kenneth was at the bottom of it all."

How very quickly did the household arrive at this portentous conclusion, which Sir Douglas imagined could be kept a secret from every one! A secret! You may keep a secret from your bosom friend; from your father confessor; but *not* from the man who stands behind your chair at dinner, or the female who "lays out" your dressing things at night. Your looks are their books; your thoughts their principal

subject of speculation; your actions, in *esse* or *posse*, the main topic of their mutual discourse.

Neil dined and supped (most discontentedly) alone with Alice, whom he profoundly disliked, that day; and wondered with the keeper during the rest of his time, what ever could have happened to his father's hand?

And the old keeper shook his head solemnly, and repeated for the fiftieth time that it was "maist surprisin', for gude Sir Douglas hadna a gun oot wi' him the morn'." And it was more surprising still that he had given no account of the accident to any one.

And so they all chatted, and wondered; while Gertrude travelled "on and on," like a princess in a fairy tale, till at length on the morrow the haven was reached, and she stood on the steps of her London home, and entered it.

Yes; Sir Douglas *had* arrived the previous day; he was out just then, but he was *there*; in their usual abode when in town.

And Gertrude also was there! She drew a long breath, a happy sigh; and pressed her mother's anxious little hand with a languid weary smile of joy.

She had only to wait for his coming in; and then all would be well.

Only to wait.

CHAPTER LIII.

WAITING FOR JOY.

GERTRUDE waited. At first patiently, pleasurably; her soft, glad eyes wandering over familiar objects; all diverse, but all covered by the misty cloud of her one thought.

Then she grew restless, and rose, and walked to and fro over the rich carpet, with that pain at the temples and in the knees which comes to nervous persons who have waited too long in anxiety and suspense.

Then she became exhausted and weary. All day long she had not broken her fast; she could not eat; something seemed to choke her in the attempt. She grew paler and paler, till at last Lady Charlotte's increasing alarm took the shape of words, which framed themselves into a little plaintive scolding.

"Now, Gertrude, I can see that whatever news Douglas has sent you, isn't pleasant news; and I don't want to interfere between man and wife, or ask what you don't offer to tell me, though I've been wonder-

ing all day what has happened; and whether he has put all his money into a lottery, and lost it; or what; for I know nothing new has happened to Kenneth;—not that Douglas is a likely man to put into a lottery, but still, however superior he may be, he might choose the wrong number, you know, and draw a blank, and you would have to retrench. Indeed, I once knew a man (a very clever man, and a friend of your father's) who was quite ruined by putting into a lottery. He chose 503, and the winning number was 505—only two off!—so very distressing and provoking! However, he taught drawing afterwards, in crayons and pastel, and did pretty well, and people were very sorry for him. But what I wanted to say was this—that you really *must* eat something, if only a sandwich, or a biscuit; for I am sure Douglas will be quite vexed when he comes in, to see you looking as you do. And you won't be able to talk matters over with him, or settle what should be done."

The last of these wandering sentences was the one that roused Gertrude. True, she would not be able to talk matters over, if she felt as faint as she did then. She would take something. She rang, and ordered biscuit and wine, and smiled over them at her mother, who, still dissatisfied, pulled her ringlet, and even bit the end of it, (which she only did in great extremities,) saying, "I wish you would tell me, Gertrude: I do so hate mysteries."

"So do I, my little mother; but this is Douglas's secret, not mine;" and with a gentle embrace, Gertrude hushed the querulous little woman; and then turning with a sigh to the window, "It is getting very late," she said, "Douglas must be dining at his club. Call me when he comes, and I will lie down on the sofa meanwhile."

The fatigue and agitation of the day, and the nourishment, light as it was, that Gertrude had taken, together with the increasing stillness and dimness of all things round her soon lulled her senses into torpor, and suspense was lost in a deep, quiet sleep.

Lady Charlotte dozed a little too: but her fatigue was less and her restlessness greater. She was extremely curious to know what had occurred, and was mentally taking an inventory of the objects in the room, with a view to a possible auction—if Sir Douglas had indeed ruined himself by staking his all on a lottery-ticket—when she heard the rapid wheels of his cab drive up to the house, saw him alight, and heard the door of the library open and swing to, as he entered that sanctum.

Lady Charlotte glanced towards her daughter, who was still sleeping profoundly. It was a pity to wake her. She would go down herself and see Sir Douglas, and he could come by and by to Gertrude.

In pursuance of this resolve, she went gently down the broad staircase, somewhat haunted by recollections of days when Eusebia used to sail down them dressed in very full dress for the opera, outshining her hostess and sister-in-law alike in the multiplicity of her gowns and of her conquests, and preceding Gertrude, more simply attired and leaning in dull domesticity on her husband's arm.

"And now only suppose he is ruined; it will be worse even than Kenneth!" thought the bewildered mother, as she pushed the heavy green baize door forward, and came into Sir Douglas's presence.

"Oh, dear!" was all she said when she saw him; and she stood for a moment extremely frightened and perplexed, pulling her long curl to a straight line in her agitation.

For it seemed to her that if ever she saw the image of a ruined man, she saw it now.

The table was loaded with parcels, with parchments, with letters; a hatcase and a swordcase were at one end, and an open paper, looking very like a deed, or a lease, or a will, by the heavy silver inkstand at the other.

Sir Douglas himself, pale as death, except one bright scarlet spot at his cheekbone — with a grieved determined look on his mouth which she had never seen there before, — was apparently giving final directions to his man of business; and as that person bowed and retired, he turned, with what seemed to poor Lady Charlotte a most haughty and angry stare, to see who was intruding upon him at this other entrance.

Her alarm increased, when with a sudden fire in his eyes (looking, she thought, "so like Kenneth!") he recognised her, and without further welcome than "Good God, Lady Charlotte!" motioned her, as it were to leave him.

Lady Charlotte had a little access of peevish courage at that moment, for she thought, if this was the mood of her daughter's husband, he might disturb and alarm his wife beyond measure. He might really make her quite ill after all her fatigue. Her poor tired Gertrude! It would be very unfair!

Lady Charlotte was a weak woman, but what strength she had, lay in love for

her daughter; and though rather afraid of Sir Douglas at all times, she was least afraid when it was a question of Gertrude's well-being. Like the lady in the old ballad, who saw the armed ghost: —

"Love conquered fear" —

even in her. She was, besides, rather angry with her stately son-in-law for being "ruined," (which was her *idée fixe* for the hour,) so she said very bravely, "I do hope, Sir Douglas, before you go up to Gertrude — whatever you have to tell her." —

But Sir Douglas did not wait for the end of the sentence. He said, in a sort of a hoarse whisper, "Is she *here*?"

"Of course she is here. Good gracious, you might be sure she would come directly; and what I wanted to beg" —

Again Sir Douglas interrupted. He advanced a few steps, and stood close to Lady Charlotte, looking down on her, as she afterwards expressed it, "most frightfully," while the hot spot vanished out of his cheek, and even his lips grew ashy pale.

"You have come to plead for her?" he said, in a low, strange tone. "Do not attempt it. It would be utterly in vain. My resolves are taken. Tell Gertrude — tell Lady Ross — that all is over forever between us. She may rouse me to wrath, she may rouse me to *madness*" (and he struck his breast wildly with his clenched hand as he spoke), "but the lost love, and the vanished trust, she will never raise to life again while *my* life lasts. Make no scandal of lamenting here; among servants and inferiors. Take her away. Do not speak. I will hear nothing. Do not write. I will read no letter that alludes to her. So far as lies in my power her very name (and, thank God, it is not a common one) shall never be uttered before me again."

He paused, and leaned his hand on the table among those scattered papers, to which Lady Charlotte's terrified and bewildered eyes mechanically followed. Then he resumed, in a stern, unnaturally quiet tone.

"All my arrangements are made. This house will be sold as soon as they can conveniently be carried out. I leave it in a few minutes forever. I have spoken to — to your daughter — about Neil's holidays at Glenrossie. She will have told you. There is war now threatening for England; and chances —" (of death in battle for men desirous to die — was the thought; but he

did not give it utterance). He broke suddenly off. "I must wish you farewell, Lady Charlotte! I wish you farewell!"

Whether he vanished, or leaped out of the window, or went through one of the library doors like any other mortal Christian man, Lady Charlotte could never have told to her dying day. Gasping with terror and surprise far too real and intense for the little bursts of weeping in the embroidered pocket handkerchief, which were the ordinary safety valves of her emotion; dimly comprehending that it was a dreadful quarrel between him and Gertrude — not "ruin" of fortune, or rash speculation, that caused this bewildering outburst — the poor little woman tottered away, and crept back up the handsome staircase, desecrated by memories of Euesbia's triumphs, as far as the first landing. There she sat down to consider what she could possibly do next. Was she to wake Gertrude only to tell her all this? Her tired Gertrude, who lay slumbering so softly? Surely not! She must think; she must reflect; she could not yet even re-enter the drawing-room. She "didn't know what on earth to do." So Lady Charlotte sat on the landing in the half-lit house, leaning on a great roll of carpeting which was deposited there, "the family being out of town." And the under-housemaid passing that way saw the lady sitting thus strangely on the stairs; and not knowing what else to say, asked "if she would like some tea?" And Lady Charlotte, in an abstracted and despairing sort of way, replied, "Oh! dear no; never again — never!" And the under-housemaid told the housekeeper; and the two or three servants at the town-house came to quite as rapid a conclusion as the servants at Glenrossie. "Sir Douglas had come up to London in such a fluster; and had gone away without even saying good-by to my lady though she was in the drawing-room; and my lady's mother had been sitting on the landing of the stairs, and had said she never would drink tea again!"

What *could* that mean but family disruption, separation, perhaps divorce?

All this while Gertrude slumbered on, Oh! how tranquil, and peaceful, and child-like, were those slumbers! No warning dream mingled with their stillness. She heard no sound of the rushing train speeding along blank lines, and under dull-echoing tunnels, in the pale moonlight, to reach the great sea-port of England. No echo of the beating ocean splashing and heaving under the dark steamer, whose powerful revolving machinery was to carry away that

grieving, angry heart; that deceived band! She saw no visions of her Douglas sitting alone on the dim deck, leaning over the ship's side —

"Watching the waves that fled before his face" —

and seeing nothing there but his sorrow.

She slept: — as children sleep, through thunder-storm, or with death busy in the house; all outward things sealed from her perceptions; gently barred and shut out, — even as the common light was barred, by the closing against it of her snow-white eyelids.

And long after her mother had crept from the landing, up the second short flight of bare uncarpeted steps, into the room she left, she still slept on!

And Lady Charlotte watched her with fear and trembling; wondering what she should do, and how comport herself. Gertrude should open those serene eyes and ask if Douglas had yet returned!

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW JOY VANISHED.

THAT moment came. The sweet girl slowly lifted their long curtained bed with the transient bewilderment in the face of one who has slept in a strange place; then the sweet lips smiled, and with a sense of rest and refreshment in her countenance she sat up and spoke the dreaded words: "My darling mother, how fagged you are! is it very late? Is Douglas come in?"

In a moment more she had started on her feet; for Lady Charlotte looked at her, trembling, excessively, without attempting to answer the question.

"Mother, dearest mother, he is come! you have seen him. My foolish Douglas! Where is he? Did he frighten you? it is all so base and bad, I wanted to wait till I had seen him, till all was well before you were pained by knowing Where is he?" and she passed swiftly to the door as if to go to him.

Lady Charlotte flung her arms round her daughter.

"My darling Gertie, you must be patient; you must indeed: he was not to be spoken to: he wasn't really quite in his right mind; he was raving."

"Mother — do not detain me — I see my husband! I had rather he

me dead than not attempt to meet now him and try to convince him of the truth. I know him! I know him! I know his inmost soul. He will hear me, if he will hear no one else. You don't know what has happened."

"Gertrude, my love, my dearest,—it is of no use—you—you can't see him—he is gone!"

"Gone where? Gone.—rather than meet me! Gone back to Scotland?"

"Oh! dear me, I'm sure I don't know where he is gone, or what he is at! He was as wild as Kenneth at Naples, only not so rude, (but much more dreadful!) and he said all sorts of shocking things about wrath, and madness, and not trusting and never seeing you again; and, that he wouldn't hear me speak of you,—and wouldn't read anything written about you,—and that your name should never be uttered before him as long as he lived!"

"And you let me sleep on!"

Lady Charlotte scarcely heard this exclamation, but continued hurriedly—

"And he said this house was to be sold; and that all his arrangements were made (whatever that might mean), and that he told you already about Glenrösie and Neil,—and"—

"Oh, mother! oh, mother! oh, mother!" burst from Gertrude in such increasingly, wild hysterical, ascending tones, as thrilled through poor Lady Charlotte's very marrow.

"You let me sleep on! How could you let me sleep on? You have destroyed me! How could you? how could you? Oh, God!" and she vehemently disengaged herself from Lady Charlotte's clinging embrace.

Then Gertrude had to bear what many persons in days of affliction have to bear,—namely, that in the midst of their greatest anguish, some lesser anguish from one they love or are bound to consider, breaks in, and claims their attention from their own misery.

For Lady Charlotte, thunderstruck at the tone of bitter reproach, and the gesture that accompanied it, from her ever-loving daughter, burst into tears on her own account; and kept sobbing out,—

"Oh! dear! oh! good gracious, Gertrude! that I should ever live to hear you speak to me in such a voice as that! your own mother! Oh dear me! If your poor father could have lived to hear such a thing? It isn't my fault that you've married such a violent man; all such violent men they are! Kenneth isn't a bit worse in reality than

Douglas and Neil—yes, even dear Neil has his tempers! And I did mean to wake you as you bid me; but he alarmed me so, and went away like—like—like a flash of lightning from the sky! And after all he may come back again, just as oddly; and you shouldn't speak to me in that way! Oh! dear! oh dear me! Oh!"

"No; I ought not. You must forgive me, little mother. Don't cry any more—don't; it bewilders me! You do not know what has happened."

"Well, what has happened?" said Lady Charlotte, drying her tears, but still questioning in rather a peevish querulous manner. "You ought to have told me before. I ought to have known. I told you this afternoon that you had better tell me."

And she gave two or three final little sobs, and then withdrew the lace handkerchief and listened.

"Douglas has been led to believe that I am false at heart—and for Kenneth!" said Gertrude in a low sad voice, not unmixed with scorn.

"And how dare he believe any such thing? Now that is the man you thought so clever, Gertie; and so superior; and you would marry him; and I told you not to spoil, and you *did* spoil him. Nothing spoils a man like making him think that he is always in the right; for then he thinks himself of course in the right when he is entirely in the wrong; and if I were you, instead of grieving"—

"Oh, mother, have pity on me. Have patience with me. If Douglas and I are really parted, I shall die of grief! I can't live if he thinks ill of me! I can't live if I do not see him. Where is he gone? Did he say where?"

"No, Gertie. He said in his wild way (just like Kenneth), that he was 'gone for ever!' But he can't go for ever; it's all nonsense; and a man can't leave home for ever all of a sudden in that sort of way; I dare say he only wanted to frighten me. I was very much frightened. Now, my darling Gertie," she added impatiently, "don't stand looking as if you were nothing but a stone image; pray don't! Shall I ask the housekeeper if *she* knows where he is gone? Only you know of course she'll guess there's a quarrel."

"Oh! what does that signify? What does anything signify but seeing him? Let me only see him—and then—come what come may!"

So Saying, Gertrude flung herself on a seat, and covered her face with her hand;

and her mother rang the bell in the second drawing-room, and summoned the housekeeper to the library.

The lamps were extinguished there, and the papers and packages cleared away. Nothing was visible when the housekeeper entered, and set her solitary candle on the high black marble mantlepiece, but a little ghastly litter, like a gleaned field by moonlight.

Lady Charlotte felt exceedingly embarrassed; it was so difficult to tell the servant that her daughter did not know where her husband was. At last she framed her question; with considerable circumlocution, and not without allusion to Sir Douglas's "hasty temper."

The housekeeper's own temper did not seem to be in a very favourable state, for she answered rather tartly that she "didn't know nothing," except that Sir Douglas had told her her services were not required after her month was up, "which was sudden enough, considering;" but as she understood the house was to be sold, there was no help for that. And as to where he was gone, she didn't know that, either, for *certain*, but he had been at the Horse Guards "unceasing," the last two days, his man said; and she understood from the same authority, that he was "proceedin' to the seat of war," which Lady Charlotte knew as well as she did was "somewheres in the Crimera." He was gone by express train that evening, and she hoped my lady would not be offended, but she had orders to show the house for selling or letting as soon as it could be got ready, and it must be left *empty*.

All in a very curt, abrupt displeased manner, as became a housekeeper who comprehended that her "services were no longer required," because her master had quarrelled with his wife.

Lady Charlotte returned to Gertrude. She stammered out the evil news, looking fearfully in her daughter's face, as if expecting further reproaches.

But Gertrude only gave a low moan, and then, kissing her cheek, bade her go to rest.

"And you, child? and you my Gertie?"

"I will come when I have written to Lorimer Boyd at Vienna."

CHAPTER LV.

LORIMER BOYD.

WHEN Lorimer Boyd got that letter, he behaved exactly like Sir Patrick Spens, in

the old Scotch ballad; when the King sent him the commission that drowned him and his companions (ships being as ill-built apparently in those days as in our own.)

"The first line that Sir Patrick read

A loud laugh laughed he.

The second line that Sir Patrick read

The tear blinded his 'ee."

Yes, Lorimer Boyd, laughed hysterically like a foolish school-girl. Here was the woman, this angel (for though he never breathed it to mortal man, that was his private estimation of Gertrude Norton), not only not valued, to the extent of her deserts, but actually thrown off, suspected, contemned, by the man who had the supreme good fortune to win affections and marry her. Do he not blind, like eyes? and can they be cured as of a cataract, — of that hard blindness which grows and grows between them and the clear light of Heaven, obscuring all judgment, and makes them walk to the precipice as though they were following the open road of natural life?

That Douglas should behave thus! DER-LAS!

But what was the use of pondering — pausing over that? Did not the letter tell him that it was so; and did not that tell — from her for whom Lorimer could not die — beseech his intervention, in order to communicate the real facts — to him whom Gertrude would have died to set all well again between that blind man and the heart that was beating and breaking with grief, in that fair woman's bosom.

In one thing more Lorimer expected conduct of gallant Sir Patrick Spens — instantly set about the task proposed, whether his own suffering might be increased in it or not.

While Gertrude was yet anxiously waiting a reply to her letter — promising that Lorimer would write those explanations to Douglas which she had failed to make — Lorimer himself stood before her!

In her surprise, in her thankful gladness to see him — bitter as it was to be believed by her old tried friend that her husband — she extended both hands towards him, and with a little sob burst into tears.

The pulses in Lorimer's brain ached, throbbed loud and hard. Her tears dripped through him. Sudden memories of grievous weeping by the dead father, so loved, whom he had been so kind to over him. Tears shed in girlhood with

was free — free to marry whom she pleased, Lorimer himself, or any other man.

He stood mute, gazing at her; and then gave a hurried, hesitating greeting, a little more formal than usual. His longings were so great to take her madly in his arms, that he dared not touch her hand.

"Your letter — surprised me," he said in a thick suffocated voice, as he sat down.

"Yes," she said faintly, in reply.

"I am here to do your bidding. I have leave from my post in spite of this busy warlike, threatening time. I shall be in London quite long enough to get Douglas's reply."

"Yes."

"I would go to him, if you wished it."

She shook her head.

"It would be pleasanter — less painful, I mean — to him, to read a letter than to be spoken to — on such a subject — even by — so good and true a friend as you have always been to us."

She spoke with increasing agitation at every word; pausing; looking down.

Then suddenly those unequalled eyes looked up, and met his own.

"Oh! Lorimer Boyd, I feel so ashamed! And yet, you know — you *know*, I ought not. You know how I have loved my husband from first to last. From the days when he was a mere heroic vision, when *you* taught me to admire, to the days when I knew him — and he loved me!"

True. Yes. No doubt, Lorimer himself had turned the young girl's fancy to the ideal of love and bravery he had described to her. *He* had taught her (even while listening to his faithful ungainly self) to picture the stately Highland boy sighing in his alien home, petting and caressing first his brother and then his brother's son; the youth beloved and admired; the soldier of after-life, treading fields of glory where battles were lost and won.

Lorimer himself had taught her to love Douglas! Would he unteach her now, if that were possible? No. The double faith to both was well kept; though neither could ever know the cost. Blind-hearted friend — sweet dream of perfect womanhood — come together again, and be happy once more, if the old true comrade through life can serve you to that end.

Every day to Lady Charlotte's little decorated drawing-room — every evening, and almost mornings, came the familiar step and welcome face. He soothed and occupied those feverish hours of Gertrude's. He read to her. Ah! how his voice, deep, sweet, and melodious, reading passages from favourite

authors, reminded *her*, also, of the first sorrow of her life, the illness and death of her father! How thankful she had felt to him then; how thankful she felt to him now. How her heart went out to him the day Neil went back to Eton, and she saw the tears stand in his eyes, holding the unconscious boy's hand in his own; looking at the fair open brow and candid eyes, shadowed by the dark clustering curls, so like her Douglas! Yes, Boyd was a *real* friend, and would help her if he could.

If he could.

But the day came when, from the hard-camp life of mismanaged preparations for war in far distant Crimea, a brief stern letter arrived from Sir Douglas Ross to Lorimer Boyd, returning him his own, and stating that he had perceived, on glancing at the first few lines, that his old friend and companion had touched on a topic of which no man could be the judge but himself, and which neither man or woman should ever moot with him again. That he besought him — by all the tender regard they had for each other from boyhood till the present hour — *not* to break friendship by recurring to it in any way or at any time. That occasional letters from Boyd should be the greatest comfort he could hope for on this side the grave, but if that one forbidden subject were alluded to, Sir Douglas would not read them.

And so the dream of hope ended! And all the comfort Lorimer could give was that, being innocent, the day would surely come when Gertrude would be cleared. That there was nothing so suicidal as hypocrisy, or so short-lived as the bubble blown by lying lips to glitter with many changing colours in the light of day. Lorimer built on some catastrophe to Frere and Alice more than on any effort of Gertrude's; but all trace of Frere was lost again; and what consolation could Gertrude receive from such dreams, when at any moment the precious life might be risked and lost — dearer than her own? Her Douglas dying — if he died — far away and unreconciled, was the haunting thought, the worm that gnawed her heart away.

Every day she pined more and more, and altered more and more in looks; inasmuch that she herself, one twilight evening, passing by her own bust executed by Macdonald of Rome, and lit at that moment by the soft misty glow which marks the impeded sunset of a London drawing-room, paused and sighed, and said to herself, "Was I ever like that?"

The deep-lidded, calm eyes — which no modern sculptor ever has given with such

life-like grace and truth — the gentle youthful smile of the mouth — all seemed to mock her with their beauty, and, as the brief rose-tint vanished from the marble in the deepening grey of evening, to say to her, "Pine and fade, pine and fade, for love and joy are gone for ever!"

CHAPTER LVI.

A SEPARATED WIFE.

If the thought of distant Douglas was the worm that gnawed the heart of Gertrude, the worm that gnawed Lady Charlotte was what she termed "her daughter's position."

For it had flown like wild-fire round the town, first in Edinburgh, and then in London, that young Lady Ross and her elderly husband, had separated.

"A most shocking story my dear," with many shakes of the head.

"All the accidents were against her," her complaining parent declared.

Even an event which at first sight seemed a relief, the departure of Kenneth and Eusebia, had an evil result. For neither did that erratic couple depart together. Eusebia, after the most violent and frantic denunciations of Gertrude, whom she had accused of first seducing Kenneth from her, and then getting his uncle to forbid him the house, — declared that she neither could nor would live at Torrieburn. She would return to Spain; she would be free.

Packing therefore into their multifarious cases all the glittering jewels (paid and unpaid) which she had accumulated since her marriage; all the flashing fans, and fringed skirts, and black and white blonde, and Parisian patterns, which formed her study from morning to night, she set forth, as the housekeeper expressed it, "without saying with your leave or by your leave."

She never even inquired what was to become of Effie, or offered to say farewell to Kenneth.

But the latter, enraged more than grieved at her conduct, and doubly enraged at finding that by a singular coincidence Monzies of Craigievar had also chosen this especial time for a foreign tour, resolved to quit a scene so bitter to him as Torrieburn had become, and also to betake himself to Granada, whether for vengeance or reunion he himself could not have told.

Pale Effie, with her large loving eyes, entreated to go with him, but in vain. He would return for her. She must be patient. She must go and stay a little while with his

mother. She must be a good girl; she couldn't be troubled with her just then.

With all these arrangements or disarrangements, Gertrude had certainly nothing to do; but the world told a very different story. She was a wily, prodigal woman: her husband had renounced her; she had broken Eusebia's heart, and divided Kenneth and his once attached uncle for ever. Most of the ladies had "foreseen what must come to." They could not think of leaving their cards at the house. They wondered Lady Charlotte should venture to force her daughter on society. They really pitied her for being Lady Ross's mother; they believed she had been a recently conducted wife herself, though a utter idiot, and of course quite as much guide for a person of young Lady Ross's propensities.

Some of them *did* hear that Sir Douglas was taking proceedings for a divorce. The difficulty was that he did not wish to ruin the young man Kenneth Ross. He, indeed, had been "more sinned against than sinning," and that there was a great reluctance on the part of certain necessities to come forward.

Sir Douglas's sister, for instance, was very strict, pious, and modest young person, and she had openly declared she would sooner die than be questioned and cross-questioned in a court of justice.

It was a lamentable business altogether, and quite disgraceful.

Lady Charlotte, on the other hand, thought her poor Gertrude abominably used in not being worshipped as a saint and shrouded as a martyr; besides being exposed out every evening by the *crème* of society. She was far ever with and lamenting about some call not even some card not sent in, some rudeness offered or supposed to be offered. She thought the Queen ought personally to interfere for the protection of her daughter. She tried poor Gertrude to death by little importunings and petitions to "go this once, to show you are asked," when some more than usually important occasion arose: all pleadings that it was distasteful, unnecessary, and that even were all other circumstances happy, the absence of the son-in-law, in a life of privation and distress, was surely excuse enough for not mixing with general society, — Lady Charlotte's counter-arguments. It would not signify "if nothing had happened, nothing had been said;" "it was not gaiety," it was to uphold her; and she had to consider that it wasn't only her

was Lady Charlotte,—it was the family that had to bear the disgrace.

When Mrs. Cregan endeavoured to console her by saying, "I don't believe any one of these women believe a single word of the stories against Lady Ross, or think the least ill of her in their secret hearts, but I do believe there are plenty of them who are delighted to *pretend* that they think ill of her," poor Lady Charlotte confusedly declared that *that* was exactly what pained her. "I wouldn't mind if Gertrude was *really* bad; I mean I should think it quite fair, though of course I suppose I should be vexed, being my own child. But when I *know* her to be so good, and they are all so violent and unreasonable—the Rosses of Glenrossie—I do really think the Queen ought to do something, and you see she does nothing, and there is no justice anywhere. I declare I think the people that abuse Gertrude ought to be punished. I know the tradesmen can't say things, and why should ladies? I mean that they can prosecute each other (tradesmen), because I had once a butcher who prosecuted the miller who served Mr. Skifton's father with flour: he prosecuted for being called 'a false-weighted rascal;' and I should like to know if that is as bad as the things they say of Gertrude? And there is my cousin, Lady Clochnaben; but I've written to Lorimer about *that*. It is too bad—really too bad—and enough to break one's heart."

Mrs. Cregan sighed compassionately.

"Well," she said, "I love my own girl as dearly, I think, as mother can love a child. But I declare that if I knew her to be virtuous, I should care no more for the insolence and slanders of these jealous, worldly, scandal-loving women than I should care for the hail that pattered down on the skylight of the house she was living in."

"Ah! Mrs. Cregan, but you haven't been tried, and you don't know what it is! So proud as I was of my Gertie! But I've written to Lorimer about the Clochnabens; that's one comfort."

It seemed a very slender comfort, for Lady Charlotte continued to apply her handkerchief to her eyes, and murmur to herself; but she had a strong and not misplaced confidence that Lorimer would rebuke his mother for "speaking ill of Gertrude, and refusing to call, and all that."

"I shouldn't wonder if he *made* her call—spiteful and bitter as she is, all because dear Gertie once said to her, 'This is worse than rude, it is cruel,' when she snubbed Mrs. Ross-Heaton! I hope he'll make her call."

Poor Lady Charlotte! why it should be

a satisfaction to compel a visit from one "spiteful and bitter;" and unwilling, let the great world of mysteries declare!

But Lorimer had written, sternly and somewhat too contemptuously on the subject, to his mother.

His mother did not answer him. The answer, such as it was, came from "the earl," and was worthy of the hand that penned it.

CHAPTER LVII.

SITTING IN JUDGMENT.

"MY DEAR LORIMER,—My mother put your letter into my hands. I don't often write, but as she has requested me to do so on this—I must say disgraceful—business, I do so, and add my own opinion.

"You will bear in mind the *point de départ* whence she views this affair; (very different from your own *manière de voir*). She considers Lady Ross an artful woman who, after encouraging and having a *liaison* with a great blackguard (Kenneth Ross), and God knows how many more besides, inveigles you yourself into a similar situation. You were in and out of Lady Charlotte's house like a tame dog when last you were in England; and though, from the bad company Lady Ross has kept generally both at Naples and in Scotland, a *liaison* and intimacy with you would rather raise her character than injure it, in the estimation of the world; and though I presume you will insist that the lady has not infringed the seventh commandment, yet my mother feels she has a legitimate right to be astonished at your proposing a visit from *her* under the circumstances.

"She has never doubted but that your remaining unmarried is consequent on some former disappointment with regard to this woman; whose not very prudent sayings, both to and of my mother, are probably unknown to you. My mother has nothing to go upon, to believe in the absence of her criminality; and she considers your own real happiness (which could only be consulted by marriage) marred by this entanglement. She now puts it to you: Do you in proposing this concession of a visit to Lady Ross,—intend to marry? You cannot expect her to call while *your own* intimacy in that quarter subsists. You do not, for your own character's sake, contemplate, if you marry, continuing to see Lady Ross? Still less I presume of exacting from your future wife that *she* should visit her? No

girl worthy your seeking would accept you on such terms. The world would not understand it. I would not.

"My mother's calling, of course, would be an *éclatant* testimony in Lady Ross's favour, and she has no objection to fulfil your object. But we both feel that had there been no intimacy between you and Lady R., you never could have wished any female members of your family to continue her acquaintance. You would make no excuses for her: you would simply think what THE WORLD thinks; and the opinion of the world is what you have chiefly to bear in mind. Society will of course place her higher the day after LADY CLOCHNABEN has called, than she has stood since her separation from her husband; but my mother will be more easily placated and managed, if she thinks, for the attainment of the object you have in view, you don't go beyond what is absolutely required. None of us would approve of that. The world would not. If she calls *once*, she considers that will be sufficient.

"I won't give way to the apprehension that my letter can annoy you, or that there is anything in it distasteful to you to read. I hope you consider *me* a privileged person.

"Where my mother gets all the gossip from about Lady R., I can't guess. Mrs. H. I should think: only I doubt her being so well informed.

"Do not think me *pédant*, or dry; I enter, on the contrary, into your present feelings, but I think a year hence you will change your views as to the propriety of the step which my mother is ready to take, on the express understanding already *mentioned* in my letter; and I think you have (as never Lady Ross has) no right not to be satisfied with the conditions. You have nothing to answer for, if her character is stained. The evil was done before your time.

"I once more assure you I have no intention to hurt your feelings by these observations. I speak my mind as a looker-on, and as a man who has been, many years since, himself on the verge of making irrecoverable sacrifices, and who now only has thankful that he was *suffered to escape*.

"Your affectionate Brother.

"CLOCHNABEN."

That Lorimer read this letter through without grinding it under his heel like Beneth, speaks much for his natural acquired patience.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE WORLD AS IT IS.

BUT Lorimer did not answer very patiently. The grim smile of scorn faded from his lip, only to give place to a gloomy frown; and as he drew nearer to his writing-table, preparatory to answering that ill-judged missive he struck his clenched hand on the unconscious paper, before covering it with the rapid scrawl which disturbed Lord Clochnaben's late breakfast a day or two afterwards.

"MY DEAR RICHARD, — That you write, as you say, by my mother's dictation — and report, by her desire, the comments she has thought fit to make on my attempt at arguing on the moral culpability of her conduct to her cousin, Lady Charlotte's daughter — secures you a reply which, under other circumstances, I should probably refuse to make to such a letter as you have ventured to send me.

"I need scarcely say, for the information either of yourself or my mother, that it is not I who set a value on such visits as I counselled my mother to pay, — or who consider Lady Ross's welfare dependent on the notice of persons of her own sex, probably infinitely her inferiors in many of the qualities which should most be desired in woman.

"When I see the sort of women who mingle freely, and receive liberal welcome, in what is called 'the first society in the land' — when I reflect on the lives which to my knowledge some of them have led, and which would, in my opinion, render them utterly unfit to be Lady Ross's companions, instead of its being a favour that they should visit her; when I consider the sort of hap-hazard that governs even court invitations; the gossip, the prejudice, the cant, the untruth, the want of all justice, the disbelief in all virtue, the disregard of all things right, and the indifference to all things wrong (so long as they are not found out) which exist in a certain set who nevertheless presume to judge and condemn their betters; when I hear them declare that they 'would not for worlds' visit Lady S-and-So, and in the same breath entreat a friend to procure them an invitation to the house of another more lucky acquaintance, who nevertheless passes her time less with the cardinal virtues than the seven deadly sins; — I could almost laugh at poor Lady Charlotte's anxiety as to how her daughter is received! As a clever old friend once said to me, 'It would be a farce

— if it were not a tragedy' — to see the fate of the pure and noble swayed (as far at least as worldly circumstances go) by the impure and ignoble; to see the better sort of women eagerly listening to them and believing them, instead of attempting to sift truth from falsehood on their own judgment.

"It is true that ours is a 'fast' day, and England, boastful as she always is about every thing, has ceased to boast continually of her superior virtue as she used to do (winning a little, probably, at the retort which foreign nations might make on the subject). She is content to admit that chance and certain commercial considerations run through that, as through every other channel of interest belonging to her. The ups and downs, and apparent inequalities of justice, do not trouble her, nor the agreeable certainty —

'That the rugged path of sinners
Is greatly smoothed by giving dinners.'

"It is a hollow world, full of echoes; some call, and others listen, and then, like the pigs in Scripture, they all run violently down a steep place, and are choked with their own lies.

"As to you, my dear Richard, and your comments on my 'tame doggishness' in Lady Charlotte's house, I advise you to beware of again touching on that subject. If you cannot believe in virtue, at least keep your incredulity to yourself. I remember you always had a mania for parting supposed lovers, as some old dowagers have a mania for bringing them together. I have not forgotten, when were both at college, and a youth, who had become entangled by a boyish passion, in a fit of mingled satiety and remorse left the companion he was with, in the dead of night, without farewell or warning, to learn from the lesson which the desolation of next morning might teach what such entanglements are worth; the alacrity with which you undertook to reason her out of the possibility of re-union, and the pleasure it seemed to you to cut the slender thread of her hope on that subject. Nor, in after-life, when a weak and profligate friend of maturer age had squabbled with a dancer who made a fool of him, how ingeniously you planned to crush the girl, and free him whether he wished it or no; how serenely you boasted that you would work hard to make her *seem* only self-interested, and deliberately planned, 'to starve her out' by persuading the *impresario* of the theatre not to engage her, on the threat of getting her hissed.

"Do not, I pray, exert your talents in the case of Lady Ross and myself. Be satisfied that nothing can unite us, and that nothing shall part us. Endeavour to believe for once, in spite of the experience of your own and other lives, that there *may* be such a thing as a virtuous woman in the world, and a pure friendship; even if that virtuous woman's name be the theme of lying gossip in the mouths of fools. As to my mother, tell her *this* from me — and God forgive me if I word it too harshly: — That admitting, as of course I do admit, that she has the strictest views of female morality, and generally acts upon them, I consider it not only an error of judgment, but a *crime*, in this particular case, to aid in tormenting and insulting a defenceless and sorrowful woman, by appearing to confirm the evil judgment of strangers, when, in the depths of her own heart, she knows that she does not and cannot believe Lady Ross to have been an unchaste wife, but is avenging a dislike and resentment, grounded on a totally different cause; and is in fact, as Mrs. Cregan says of many of her fashionable friends, 'glad to pretend to think ill of Gertrude' to punish her for offences given (how involuntarily!) in more fortunate days. I have written to you at length on this subject, because I never intend to touch upon it again, nor to read any thing you may write upon it. If my mother does not choose to humour poor Lady Charlotte's nervous fancies, by calling on Lady Ross, or chooses (as you pompously put it) to make but a single visit, in God's name let her stay away; but let her clearly understand, as regards me, that I discussed Lady Charlotte's wishes, because I thought it right; and whether I marry next week, or die a bachelor, that fact has no sort of connection with my settled and unalterable opinion of what it is right for her to do. And if ever I do marry, I should have no dearer wish at heart than that Gertrude Ross should approve my choice, and remain to her life's end my wife's intimate companion and bosom friend.

"Your affectionate brother,
"LORIMER."

CHAPTER LIX.

THE WICKED LIFE THAT GERTRUDE LED,
AND THE WICKED LOVE-LETTERS THEY
WROTE EACH OTHER.

THE first bitter blow, and the first pang of miserable disappointment in the apparent

impossibility of present explanation with Sir Douglas, were over. He lived in the centre of those scenes of military suffering, and proud English endurance, which have made the war of the Crimea the most memorable of all modern events. Lorimer had returned to his post at Vienna and Gertrude continued to reside in the decorated little home, which poor Lady Charlotte, when eulogizing it in former years, declared had belonged to "a bachelor of the old sex."

Placed in what might be termed after circumstances, both by the generous donations of Sir Douglas and her own inheritance, Gertrude employed her time and talents as best she might in relieving the miseries of others. True, there was little ostentation or publicity in what she did. Her name headed no list of subscribers; was conspicuous in no prospectus; made itself the object of no "movement" of real or imaginary reform. She did not even bind herself to a sort of nun's vow not to shop on Saturday and register the vow in the newspapers for fear of backsliding. But all that others who were much talked about, she did not do was not talked about. Those generalists of the gentle and charitable for emigration and education; of help to the helpless, succour to the sick, found her ready heart and hand, and liberal purse. It often she had preceded, with steady and entire success, in the same path of usefulness where afterwards a procession of fair fellow-labourers followed, their shawms and trumpets in praise of their own goodness, and assuming to be present in that path of progress where she had previously passed alone swiftly and silently without a record, and without a name. Often the meek, sad mouth could scarcely bear a melancholy smile when some one before her the advantage of a scheme which she herself had sketched out and set on foot, and gave the credit of originating to some brilliant Lady Bountiful of the day who was marshalling her forces under banners inscribed with her own name, sweeping with them over the traces of Gertrude's exertions, as the waves sweep the sand.

But steadily and calmly she pursued her road that led to the only fountain of content her grieved and restless heart could know. "When the ear heard her name, her;" but she was heard and blessed at meetings of animated, gayly-dressed, riotous women, leaning among cushions of brodered silk, and setting down their celain teacups on inlaid tables — but

dismal and dank dwellings of the poor; by the beds of groaning inmates of hospitals; in the dark night of the despairing and fallen; or among wailing children of evil parents, whose infancy, unaided, would be but a bitter preface to a bitterer maturity.

There was no lack of news of her husband to satisfy the only other craving her heart admitted. All that he did, and how he looked, and how nobly he bore the miserable outward and visible suffering which so many bore likewise heroically around him, was easy to learn and to hear. Only the inner thought — the dear and blessed communion of soul to soul in letters of husband and wife — *that* was a dark want in her life, and kept her pinched and wan in countenance, and starved at heart. Lorimer constantly wrote from Vienna, and his letters were her chief comfort. He did not dwell on the one topic that was for ever uppermost in her mind; he rather sought to draw her from it to general and wider interests. The world slandered her for his sake, as it had slandered her for Kenneth's sake; but she neither knew, nor would have heeded it if known. It remained for Lady Charlotte to fume and fret over these injustices. Those who are enduring a great sorrow are very insensible to mortification.

But in vain did poor Lady Charlotte, on being told by some cruel reporter that her cousin the Dowager had said she believed "an infamous correspondence" was still carried on between her son Lorimer and that bad young creature, Lady Ross, — declare, with many tears and agitated pulls at her curl, that they were quite harmless letters, full of different things that didn't signify." Her declaration "went for nothing; though in truth the letters of this wicked couple were all much in the style of the samples that follow.

CHAPTER LX.

AN INFAMOUS CORRESPONDENCE.

"VIENNA.

"MY DEAR GERTRUDE, — I waited at Dover, fearing to miss my letters. Douglas is well. The mismanagement of supplies, &c., is fearful. His energy, and habit of methodical arrangement, have been of use. But he writes to me, 'I wish we may not begin by a great disaster; though it is something to know that no amount of disaster will discourage English soldiers.' I passed through Paris on my way here. All as usual. No one would guess aught was going on any-

where that was tragedy instead of farce, except for the model wooden 'hut for soldiers,' erected in the Tuilleries Garden. That stands like the skull cup at Byron's wassail festivals, in the midst of the daily rout of pleasure.

"I employed my day at Dover in riding over to Walmer, to see the great Duke's nest. The housekeeper told me she had lived with the Duke twenty years; but she looked like the good fairy or witch in a pantomime, always acted by a young girl. She professed unbounded admiration for her master, and said she 'nearly fainted' the other day, from listening to abuse of him from some blackguard visitor at Walmer. She was 'te that degree flurried that she was obliged to go and sit on one of the cannon in the front garden, and walk on the bastion to recover herself; besides having the gentleman turned out' (a measure which should at once have restored her to composure).

"Here all is (outwardly) as careless as in Paris. Mrs. Cregan dined at Esterhazy's the other day: Gortschakoff, Manteuffel, Alvensleben, Figuelmont, Stackelberg, and others present. Gortschakoff affected a sort of jocund pleasantry and careless good fellowship, painful and unnatural, reminding one of the stories of Frenchmen in the Revolution, who roused and sat down to play cards, till the cart came to take them to be guillotined. Not that any ill fate, beyond failure, can await the smirking Russian; but because of the striking contrast between heavy events and light behaviour. Manteuffel was grave and grim.

"Abbas Pasha is dead. The chief delight of Abbas, when invalided, was to be drawn about in a wheeled chair by six of his prime ministers, harnessed very literally 'to the car of state.' Conceive our English Cabinet occupied in so practical a mode of showing their devotion to their sovereign!

"The Austrian Government have quartered the troops comfortably in the chateaux of the nobility. No one dares to complain. I saw one of the ousted aristocrats yesterday, murmuring gently, like a sea-shell put on dry sand, at having no house to go to.

"I saw also a humble sorrow; at the door of great Gothic St. Stephen's, a little weeping raw recruit pating with a little weeping sacristan, looking very lank and mournful in his black gown, and both their arms twined round each other's neck. As they stood there, and my eye measured that small patch and blot of human sorrow against the great height of the solid church, rising up into the cold grey sky as if it never could

fall into ruins, my pity departed, and I asked myself if any one's misery—mine theirs, or any other—could possibly signify.

"You see I am getting bitter. Nothing tries the amiable spirit like isolation. It is easy to pray in the temple; but it requires a saint to pray in the wilderness.

"I ought to be quite cheerful. My last volume of poems was a great success. I am constantly solicited to send my 'autograph' to persons I do not know. They send me postage stamps—according to the old nurse's saying, 'A penny for your thoughts;' but why, because I can write poetry, should I be set to write copies? A beautiful young American lady (at least she tells me she is young and beautiful) has written for a lock of my hair. I answered that I hoped she would not think me selfish, but though I had read in my early lessons the urgent and hopeful line—

'Oh! give relief, and Heaven will bless your store,'

Heaven had not so blessed my store as to stock me with superfluous hair; in fact, that I was getting rather bald. I hope this may moderate her enthusiasm; but there is no saying.

"Write me of your health. Remember me to Lady Charlotte. In spite of the excitement here, in spite of wars and rumours of wars, I feel as if nothing on earth were of importance. The Austrians hate us; the Russians hope to outwit us. All is flat, stale, and unprofitable, and I care for nothing but music and rest.

"Ever yours,

"LORIMER BOYD."

Gertrude's answer was more earnest, if not more cheerful. She wondered, in the midst of her own sorrow, at the gloom of his spirit. He seemed to her to have so much that should make life easy. The interest of a career; no actual grief; the sure prospect of title and fortune. So we judge the outside appearance of the lives even of those we love,—the painted porcelain of the cup, which holds, it may be, a most bitter draught. That for years his cup had been bitter on her account, and that now daily and hourly he felt only a different bitterness in that gnawing of the heart that comes when those who are deeply beloved suffer, and we cannot aid them, and those we have made demigods of, as he had made of his boyhood's friend, Sir Douglas, do something that ut-

terly disenchant us,—all this was a sealed book to Gertrude.

"DEAR LORIMER BOYD," she wrote—"I am as well as I can expect to be under the wearing pressure of continual anxiety; and my dearest mother, I think, frets less about me than she did, and looks to some possible explanation at some time or other, which is a great relief, as her sorrow vexed me so terribly.

"I am occupied from morning to night—I humbly hope usefully occupied—and I strive not to dream waking dreams, or let my thoughts depress my nerves as they used to do. Neil is well and happy at Eton, and looking forward to his holidays at Glenrosie with such joy, that I trust the very necessity of seeming to share it will enable me to bear the going there under such different, such painful circumstances! Let me be thankful that at least I shall be with him. I was much interested in all you told me, but sorry to see the 'gloom-days,' as we used to call them, have come back to haunt you. As to this war and its causes, and the chances of its continuance, I will not fear. When I see how completely and nearly equally men's opinions are divided on great questions; men of the same average calibre of intellect, of the same class of interests, under the influence of the same habits and opportunities for judgment,—I feel that nothing can be done so rapidly either for good or evil, as would suffice to satisfy an enthusiast, or create rational terror. I believe God left that balance of opinion, lest, in our world of restlessness and vanity of power, there should be a perpetual succession of violent changes. We ebb and flow with a tide, and whether the waves come in with a roar or a *creep*, they dash to nearly the same distance. Only one thing shines clear as the light of day to me—that those who are born to a certain position, or who are gifted with certain talents, are bound to exert themselves for what they conceive to be the general good, according to their honest opinion, whether that be *to stay* or *to forward* the work in hand. No man has a *right*, in a position, either hereditary or obtained, which places him a little above his fellows, with leisure to gaze on the perspective of their destiny, sluggishly to turn his head away from his appointed task—a task which by circumstance he is as much born to as the labourer's son to the plough. I have heard women say they did not comprehend the feeling of patriotism; I think I do, not so much for my country as for my

countrymen. I believe in the full measure of good which might be done; I believe in the full value of individual exertion. It has been my dream from the first, and will be my dream to the last, to watch the lives that leave their tracks of light behind, like ships on the waters. Though the wave close over the light, the tracks once explored will be crossed again even to another hemisphere, and the influence of one man's mind may outlive not only his existence, but the very memory of his name. Lorimer, dear friend, you are one of those who are called upon to act, and to make use of your worldly position and abilities, not only for yourself, but for the future of others; of others unknown, and without claim upon you beyond being God's less fortunate children. Do not say you care only for rest in a time like the present!

"Though you cannot aid England and the cause of justice among nations, sword in hand, like my beloved Douglas, you are bound to give your thoughts and energies to her service. Shall I hope you pretend carelessness, as you say Gortschakoff pretends cheerfulness and cordiality?

"My heart is made very sore by the abuse of men in power here; who are, as I believe, doing their very utmost to retrieve mistakes and alleviate suffering. You will say that such mistakes ought never to have been made; but that is over. Party spirit runs high in England. At all times it is an error: at this time of trial it is a sin. I will match your story of the obscure sorrow of St. Stephen's church with one of obscure and tranquil heroism, more difficult than that of the battle-field. One of the sick persons whose case lately came before me—a common labourer—was pronounced by the doctor to be merely suffering from extreme debility and want of nourishment. Then came inquiries into his work and wages, &c.; and at last it came out that he owed *fifteen shillings*, and, to pay this debt, he had gone on half rations for weeks, having a large family to keep, and being apprehensive he never would be able to spare it in any other way.* Does not the patient self-denial smite one to the heart? the indulgent heart that grows too often to look upon mere fancies as necessities in our own class? And does not the strong resolution of the man show brightly in the dark story? I see him, in my mind's eye, going home at the end of his day's work, hungry and tired, with his good honest purpose stronger than all the temptation of fatigue and want of re-

freshment, and at last falling ill. Remember, it never would have been known but for *that*. These are the obscure heroisms of life, and God's book is full of them, though they pass away from earth like the risen dew of the morning. Oh! Lorimer, do not say you care for nothing but music and rest.

"And forgive me, old teacher of my pleasant days of girlhood, when my dear father shared with me the advantage of your companionship, if I am grown bold enough to seem to whisper a lesson in my turn. I miss you daily here. The day does not pass that we do not speak of you, mamma and I.

"Yours affectionately,

"GERTRUDE."

So wrote and thought the wife of absent Sir Douglas. But what of that? Dowager Clochnaben fiercely denounced her for her many intrigues; the ladies who were merely imitating or following her in active good works spoke evil of her as they looked through their lists of charity subscriptions; friends of her "pleasant days of girlhood" either cut her, or made a favour of calling at the house "for poor old Lady Charlotte's sake;"—and THE WORLD, whose opinion, as Richard Clochnaben justly wrote to his brother, was what we ought chiefly to bear in mind,—pronounced that she was a bad woman; that Lorimer Boyd was her new lover; and that it was a pity a man of so much ability should suffer himself to be cajoled, and his name mixed up with that of a creature more dangerous and subtle than any dancer, or Anonyma, or person belonging to an inferior class; inasmuch as her education and accomplishments (of which she was so inordinately vain) gave her a certain hold over a man accustomed to good society, and fastidious as to his choice of companions.

And the more religious and church-going of her acquaintance, especially the more intimate visitors at Clochnaben Castle, and such as had approved the forbidding little Jamie Carmichael to attend school, because he had gathered blackberries on the Sabbath-day,—and those who had been most keen in admiration of Mr. James Frere's sermons, observed to each other that it was "just a very disgrace and shame to think of, that such a creature should be permitted to hold her head up in any decent place of resort; and they hoped God would visit her with His righteous judgments, both in this world and the world to come."

* Fact.

CHAPTER LXI.

KENNETH'S CHILD.

NEIL's holidays were come; and Neil himself, bright and beautiful, and active as a roe, was back again in the glens and hills of Glenrosie.

"It's trying to be here without papa," he had said, the first day; and Gertrude's fortitude was not proof against the gush of sudden tears that burst from her eyes at the speech. But the boy knew nothing; only that his father was "at the wars," as Richard Cœur de Lion and many other great heroes had been (including Hannibal), and as his father had frequently been before. Vague, and without much personal anxiety, were Neil's thoughts: for what boy is ever depressed by thoughts of danger? Rather he pitied his mother for her apparent lowliness and fear about this glorious profession of arms, and secretly wished he were old enough to be fighting by his father's side in the distant Crimea, — when the fighting should begin.

But gradually some strange uneasy sensation crept into that boyish heart, and lay coiled there like a tiny snake. His mother seemed to get no letters; she was so agitated and eager one day when he himself got one from his father. She was on such odd terms with his Aunt Alice, who, though she withdrew to Clochnaben Castle during the major part of his holidays, yet chose to assert the privilege of residence for a few days at the beginning. During those few days his mother had said she was too ill to dine down stairs. They scarcely spoke. The fiery blood of his passionate race bubbled up in the young breast. He wrote to Sir Douglas: "My mother seems wretchedly ill; she is grown very thin. I thought it was all fright about you; but I think now something worries her. I think Aunt Alice vexes her. If I was sure, I would hate Aunt Alice with all the power of my heart; I beg you to turn her out of the castle. They say Christians should not hate at all, but whoever vexes my mother would be to me like a murderer I ought to kill. So you ask her, dearest and best of fathers, what is the matter, and let me know."

Poor Sir Douglas! How in the midst of the snow and dreary scenes of the Crimea, his brow bent and his heart beat over the school-boy letter. His Neil! his Neil; — to whom, "whoever vexed his mother would be like a murderer whom he ought to kill!" His Neil.

And Neil in his innocent wrath made

Aunt Alice so uncomfortable with hasty looks and stinging words, on the mere chance and supposition that she was distasteful company for his mother, that she was glad to beat a retreat.

Over the hills to Clochnaben went Alice. And before the servants who were waiting at dinner, as she helped herself to some very hard unripe nectarines grown on the stern wall of the Clochnaben garden, she said she came, "because it would not have been proper for her to remain while the unfortunate woman was permitted those interviews with her son. Of course, if there had been a daughter, such a difficulty could never have arisen: she would not have been allowed to see a daughter."

And the scanty train of servants in the service of the dowager discussed the matter rigidly, and expressed their horror at the pollution of Glenrosie by Gertrude's return, and the impossibility of "Miss Alice" remaining in such tainted company.

Only Richard Clochnaben's French n-l et smiled superior, and said such things were not much thought of in Paris; that he wondered "*dans ce pays barbare*:" that they were not more civilized.

But there was no doubt of her going: the minds of any of the parties so discussing in the servants' hall.

It was in the very midst of Neil's reaction that an event occurred which profoundly impressed him, and caused Gertrude fresh agitation.

He was walking with his mother to a spot where he had given rendezvous to an old keeper, when he was to cross the hill to get a little better shooting. For he was getting very grand; and talked of good sport, and bad sport, with a boastfulness of his beardless little chin; and the keeper was wild with admiration of "a can a spirity laddie" as his young master.

He was holding his mother's hand in spite of his sport and his assumption of manliness, when suddenly they heard a little plaintive cry; and a childish and plaintive voice said, "Well, ye needn't beat me, I can get enough of this home!" in a half Scotch, half foreign accent, very peculiar.

Neil leapt through the heather: — down the hollow from whence the voice proceeded, and his mother stood on the rough broken ground above, full of white stones. A sharp cut with Alice's whip descended on the shoulder of a girl, as he advanced.

"Get back to your kennel, then."

heard a voice say, in a tone as sharp as her whip. "How dare you trespass so far on the border? Get back to Torrieburn!" and apparently the stroke was about to be repeated, when Neil darted forward, and taking the pony's rein close to the bit, drove it back so as to make it rear on its haunches.

"How dare *you*, Aunt Alice?" said he, breathlessly and passionately. "How dare you strike any one here?"

Alice sat her pony firmly: cowardice was not among her vices.

"Oh, yes; you'd better let her come further still; you'd better have her up at Glenrossie!" she said, with a bitter sneer.

"Why not?" said the boy, as he turned to look at the little girl, who stood softly chafing with one little thin hand the place on her shoulder where she had been struck, and holding flowers close against her dress with the other.

"I wanted the white heather; I didn't know I wasn't to climb farther," she said; and then she broke down, and throwing the white heather passionately from her, she burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break, covering her little pale face with both hands.

The boy's heart beat hard; he cast a look of fury on Aunt Alice and her pony, and strode towards the pale girl.

Lady Ross also glided towards them. The child uncovered her face as Alice rode away, and looked up with wondering eyes at Gertrude.

"Oh! I know you," she said, in a tender tone; "I know you! I've been very lone since you all went. Take me away from them—Oh! take me away!" And she clutched at the folds of Gertrude's dress with the little thin white hands.

"*Effie!*" was all Lady Ross could say, and she sat down on the heather brae and wept.

"*Effie!*" said Neil, wonderingly; and then he smiled. Such a smile of pity, love, and wonder, as the angels might give.

He had not at first recognized her. She had grown tall and slim, and her face was hidden by the long locks of her soft neglected hair.

"Go, dear Neil, go," said Lady Ross. "I will talk to her. I will see her home. You cannot stay; go with the keeper. I will tell you when I come home. Go, my darling."

With a wistful lingering look, the boy turned to go—stood still—came back, and said hesitatingly,

"But, mother, if it is *Effie*, mayn't she come with us?"

"No, my boy," answered poor Gertrude, in great agitation. "No. Go now, and I will see you after your shooting."

And Neil went. But before he turned again to depart he smiled at *Effie*, and *Effie* returned it with a little trembling sort of moonlight smile of her own; her long pale chestnut hair held back a little by her taper fingers, as though to make her vision of him the clearer, and her wide, wild, plaintive eyes fixed on his face.

That look haunted Neil, boy though he was, and he had "bad sport" that day;—if bad sport consists in missing almost every bird he aimed at.

Gertrude stood silently gazing at the little creature. Memories welled up in her heart, and her eyes filled again with tears.

This was Kenneth's poor little girl, Kenneth's only child, *Effie*! Poor little lone deserted *Effie*.

"Oh take me home with you to Glenrossie!" repeated the pleading voice; "they beat me so, and I am so lone."

"Why do they beat you, dear?"

"They beat me for everything. If I'm not quick, and if I'm tired, and if I don't find eggs, and if I'm frightened in the night."

"What frightens you in the night, my child?" And Gertrude drew the little trembling creature to her, and sat down with her in the long heather.

The child leaned up against her bosom and clung to her.

"I don't know. I'm scared. They told me if I did anything wrong, the BLACK DOUGLAS should come in the night and take me—tall, oh, so tall! and tramping through the heather, with only bones for his feet."

And the child shuddered, and pressed closer to Gertrude.

"Has he ever come?"

"No!" said the little girl, with a sudden look of wonder.

"No, *Effie*, nor ever will come; it's a story, an ignorant, foolish story. There is no such thing! Do you think God would let a poor little child be tormented by such a shocking thing when she did not mean to do wrong? Do you say your prayers, *Effie*?"

"Oh, yes!"

"When?"

"In the morning I say them on my knees, and in the night I say some with my head under the bedclothes."

"Do you think there are two Gods,

Effie? One for the day and another for the night?"

"No; one God — one God!" said the child, faltering.

"Are you afraid in the day?"

"No! Oh, no!" said the little girl with a wild smile. "I see the birds, and the deer, and the walking things, and the blue in the sky, and I'm not afraid at all."

"Then do you think the God who watches in the day forsakes the world at night, Effie? forsakes all His creatures asleep — for it is not only you, you know, Effie, who lie sleeping, but all those you have named — the poor little birds in their nests, and the shy deer among the fern, and the fish in the smooth lake: do you think, as soon as DARK comes, He gives them all over to be tormented and scared?"

The child was silent.

"Effie, God is a good and merciful God, and He watches the night as He watches the day, and you are as safe in the dark under His care as in this bright, cloudless day. He is all mercy and all goodness."

Children startle their elders sometimes by questions too profound for answer. Effie gave a deep, shivering sigh, and said in a tone of grave reflection.

"Then why did He let me be?"

"What do you mean, Effie?"

"Why, if He is merciful and good, does He let me be in the world at all? Nobody cares for me, nobody wants me, and I don't want to be here; but God puts me here. Oh! if I were but away in heaven!" and she lifted her eyes with miserable yearning to the blue sky. "I'm a scrap of a creature, and it's seldom I feel well; I've a pain almost always in my side, and that's what makes me slow, and then they beat me; and there's such strong, happy children die: a good many have died since you were here, Lady Ross, and I go and look at their graves in the burial-ground on Sundays; and that's when I say to myself, Why should I be at all?"

"Effie, it is God's will that we should be — all of us; and be sure that He has some task for us to do, or He would not put us here. But He does not torment us. Promise me if you wake in the night to think of that, and to think of me, and to think that we are sitting here in the sunshine, talking of His goodness."

"I'll try; but, oh! in the night I'll be scared with the thought of the Black Douglas!"

"No, my child. Think of me, not of

the Black Douglas, and say this little rhyme: —

"'Lord, I lay me down to sleep!
Do thou my soul in mercy keep;
And if I die before I wake,
Do Thou my soul in mercy take.'"

That rhyme, Effie, was told me by a very clever man, who always said it from the day when he was a little child, and you must always say it all your life long for love of me."

"Oh! I do love you," said the poor creature, creeping close, as though it would creep into her very heart. "I do love you, and please take me home with you."

"I cannot, Effie," said Gertrude sadly. "And now I must go my way, and you must go yours. Good-by."

"Won't you come with me never so little on the way?"

Gertrude looked down on the large, pleading eyes moist with tears. She took the slight form in her arms and wept.

"Some day, little Effie, some day, perhaps, we may be all together; but not now! God bless and protect you. God bless you!"

And so saying, and weeping still, Lady Ross turned to go homewards. She passed at a turn on the hills, and looked back. The little creature had sat wearily down, her hands clasped round her slim knees, looking out with her large sad eyes at a light of the declining day.

Was she again thinking, "Why should I be?" Kenneth's deserted child?

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW EFFIE WAS GLADDENED.

THE mystery of Effie not being allowed to return with them troubled Neil more than all that had disturbed him before. His disquieted soul was none the more composed when his mother, clasping both arms round him, and leaning her head on his breast, gave the faltering explanation. "Your cousin Kenneth has displeased his father, very much, and he would not allow Effie to be at the castle."

"Oh, every one says Cousin Kenneth is not a good man, and he gets drunk and is that," replied Neil; "but what has he done?"

And the boy roamed up and down

watched for the little face, pale almost as the white hea. her she had come to seek; but she had vanished away from the near landscape, and into the distance he was forbidden to follow her. And so the holidays ended.

Once only had Gertrude herself attempted further intercourse with the banished child. It was but a few days after their discourse about her terrors by night, and Gertrude's tender heart was haunted by the memory of the pleading eyes. She thought she would brave the pain for herself, and go and see Maggie, at the New Mill, as they called the place Old Sir Douglas had allotted them, and there speak to her of the fragile flower left to her rough guidance.

But Maggie's ignorant wrath was roused by the very sight of Gertrude. Fixed was her notion, that if Gertrude had wedded with her son all would have gone well. Gertrude had blighted all their lives. As to Effie, she sullenly defended her own right to manage her which way she pleased. She was "her ain bairn, and bairns maun be trained and taught." She'd been "beat herself" when she was a bairn, and was never a pin the waur — may be the better." And as the meek low voice of Gertrude pleaded on, Maggie seemed roused to positive exasperation, and burst out at last, "Lord's sake, Lady Ross, will ye no gie ower? Ye'll just gar me beat her double, to quiet my heart. Gang back to yere ain bairn, and leave Effie to me. It's little gude ye can be till her, noo that ye've ruined her fayther, and thrawn me amaisa daft, wi' yere fashious doin's. Gang awa' wi' ye! Gang awa'!"

And, suiting the action to the word, Maggie waved her tempestuous white arms angrily in the air, much in the same manner as if she had desired to chase a flock of turkeys from her poultry-yard; and, turning with a sudden flounce into the house, and perceiving Effie leaning in the doorway, she administered a resounding slap on the delicate shoulder; for no particular reason that could be guessed, unless, according to her own phrase, it was "to quiet her heart."

From that time, for two years more, Gertrude never saw Kenneth's child; but at the end of the second year a chance interview again gave her an opportunity of judging the effect of Maggie's education on her mind, and of the lapse of time upon her beauty.

Slimmer, taller, more graceful than ever — her large eyes seeming larger still from a sort of sick hollowness in her cheek — Effie came swiftly up to her as she stood one day

gazing at the Hut, waiting for Neil, but dreaming of other times. How altered Effie seemed!

Neil, too, had altered. He was beginning to be quite a tall youth; and his bold bright brow had a look of angry sadness on it; for do what they would, his keen soul had ferreted out the existence of some painful secret; and, driven by his mother's silence to perpetual endeavours to discover for himself what had occurred in his family, he heard at last from Ailie's adder tongue the sharp sentence — "Good gracious, boy, do ye not know that your father and mother have quarrelled and parted?"

Quarrelled and parted! His idolized father: his angel mother!

Still, not taking in the full measure of misfortune, he answered fiercely, "If they've quarrelled, Aunt Alice, it is that *you've* made mischief. I'm certain of that."

"You'd better ask your mother whether that's it," sneered Alice, and whisked away from him to her tower-room.

But Neil would not ask his mother. Only he kissed her with more fervent tenderness that night, and held her hand in his, and looked into her eyes, and ruminated on what should be done to any one who harmed a hair of that precious mother's lovely head; and from that hour he doubled his obedience and submission to her will, watching the very slightest of her inclinations or fancies about him, and forestalling, when he could, every wish she seemed to form.

And he prayed — that young lad — oh! how fervently he prayed, in his own room, by many a clear moonlight and murky midnight, that God would bless his mother, and that if — if Aunt Ailie spoke the truth, God would reconcile those dear parents, and bring back joy again to their household.

But to his mother he said nothing.

And when she stood by the Hut that day thinking of him, thinking of all the past, — that darkest of shadows, the knowledge that he knew there was some quarrel between his parents — had not passed over her heart.

Standing there, then, in her mood of thoughtful melancholy, her soul far away in the dismal camp by the Black Sea — in the tents of men who were friends and comrades of the husband who had renounced her — the light flitting forwards of Effie was not at first perceived.

But the young girl laid her little hand on the startled arm, and whispered breathlessly — "Oh, forgive my coming! but such joy has happened to me; I wanted so sore to tell

you! I've rowed across the lake in the coble alone, just to say to you the words of the song, 'He's comin' again.' Papa's coming! He's to be back directly, and I'm to go from the New Mill to Torrieburn! Oh! I could dance for joy! I'll not be frightened when I sleep under the same roof again with papa. It's all joy, joy, joy, now,—for ever!"

CHAPTER LXIII.

KENNETH COMES BACK.

BUT it was not joy. Kenneth returned a drunken wreck; overwhelmed with debts he had no means of discharging; baffled and laughed at by the Spanish wife he had no means of controlling or punishing; ruined in health by systematic and habitual intemperance. He seemed, even to his anxious little daughter, a strange, frightful vision of his former self. His handsome face was either flushed with the purple and unwholesome flush of extreme excess, or pallid almost to death with exhaustion. He wept for slight emotion; he raved and swore on slight provocation; he fainted and sank after slight fatigue. He was a ruined man! The first, second, and third consultation on the subject of his affairs only confirmed the lawyer's and agent's opinion that he must sell Torrieburn, if he desired to live on any income, or pay a single debt.

Sell Torrieburn! It was a bitter pill to swallow; but it must be taken. Torrieburn was advertised. Torrieburn was to be disposed of by "public roup."

The morning of that disastrous day, Kenneth was saved from much pain by being partially unconscious of the business that was transacting. He had been drinking for days, and when that day—that fatal day—dawned, he was still sitting in his chair, never having been to bed all night, his hair tangled and matted, his eyes bloodshot, his face as pale as ashes.

With a gloomy effort at recollection, he looked round at Effie, who was crouched in a corner of the room watching him, like a young fawn among the bracken.

"Do you remember what day it is, child?" he said, in a harsh, hoarse voice.

"Oh, papa!" said the little maiden, "do not think of sorrowful things. Come away; come out over the hills, and think no more of what is to happen here. Come away."

To the last, in spite of all his foul offences against that generous heart, Kenneth had somehow dreamed he would be rescued

at the worst by his uncle. He was not rescued. But at the eleventh hour there came an order from Sir Douglas that Torrieburn was to be bought in—bought at the extreme price that might be bid for it, and settled on Kenneth's daughter and her heirs for entail.

"Come away!" said the plaintive young voice, and Kenneth left the house that had been his own and his father's, and went as a stripped and homeless man over the hills. His head did not get better; it got worse. He swayed to and fro as he climbed the hills; he pressed onward with the gait of a staggering, drunken, delirious wretch, and he was. He looked back from the hill at Torrieburn smiling in the late autumn sun, and wept as Boabdil wept, when he looked back at the fair lost city of Granada. No taunting voice upbraided his tears; a proud virago spoke, like Boabdil's monarch, of the weakness that had wrecked him; the folly that made all, irrevocable and irrevocable despair.

The gentle child of his reckless mother followed with her light footsteps as he went still upwards and upwards. Panting and weary, she crouched down by his side, and at length he flung himself, face downward on the earth. The slender little hand touched his hot forehead with their gentle touch. The small cool lips pressed his burning cheek and hot eyelids with tiny kisses of consolation.

"Oh! papa, come home again, or come to the New Mill; to Grandmamma Macgregor. You are tired; you are cold; don't stay here on the hills; come to the New Mill, come!"

But Kenneth heeded her not. With a delirious laugh, he spoke and muttered himself; sang, shouted, and blasphemed, blasphemed, shouted, and sang.

The little girl looked despairingly at her, as the cold mist settled on the old mountains, clothing all in a ghost-like shroud. "Come away, papa!" was still her earnest cry. "Come away, and sit by a good fire at the New Mill. Don't stay here!"

In vain! The mist grew thicker and more chill, but Kenneth sat rocking backwards and forwards, taking from time to time long draughts from his whiskey-bottle, and singing defiant snatches of songs he had sung with boon-companions long ago. At length he seemed to get weary; wearied away; and Effie, fainting with grief, laid her poor little dishevelled head on his breast, and sank into a comatose slumber.

Both lay resting on the shelterless hills; that drunken wretched man, and the innocent girl-child. And the pale moon struggled through the mist, and tinged the faces of the sleepers with a yet more pallid light.

So they lay till morning; and when morning broke, the mist was thicker yet on lake and mountain. You could not have seen through its icy veil, no, not the distance of a few inches.

Effie woke, chilled to the very marrow of her bones.

Her weak voice echoed the tones of the night before, with tearful earnestness.

"Oh, papa, come home! or come to the good fire burning at the New Mill. Oh, papa, come home—come home!"

As she passionately reiterated the request, she once more pressed her fervent lips to the sleeping drunkard's cheek.

What vague terror was it, that thrilled her soul at that familiar contact? What was there, in the stiff, half-open mouth, the eyes that saw no light, the ear that heard no sound, that even to that innocent creature who had never seen death, spoke of its unknown mystery, and paralysed her soul with fear? A wild cry—such as might be given by a wounded animal—burst from Effie's throat; and she turned to flee from the half-understood dread to seek assistance for her father,—her arms outspread before her,—plunging through the mist down the hill they had toiled to ascend the night before. As she staggered forward through the thick cold cloud, she was conscious of the approach of something meeting her; panting heavily, as she was herself breath-

ing; struggling upwards, as she was struggling downwards; it might be a hind—or a wild stag—or a human being—but at all events it was LIFE, and behind was DEATH,—so Effie still plunged on! She met the ascending form; her faint eyes saw, as in a holy vision, the earnest beautiful face of Neil, strained with wonder and excitement; and with a repetition of the wild cry she had before given, she sank into his suddenly clasping arms in a deadly swoon of exhaustion and terror.

The keeper was with Neil. He found Kenneth where he lay; lifted the handsome head, and looked in the glazed eye.

"Gang hame, sir, and send assistance," was all he said. "Will I help ye to carry wee missie?"

"No—no. No," exclaimed Neil, as he wound his strenuous young arms round the slender fairy form of his wretched little cousin. "Trust me, I'll get Effie safe down to Torrieburn, and I'll send men up to help Cousin Kenneth to come down too. Is he very drunk?"

"Gude save us, sir; ye'll need to send twa stout hearts for a stour brae; for I'm thinking Mr. Kenneth's seen the last o' the hills. Ye'll need just to send men to fetch THE BODY."

And with this dreadful sentence beating in his ears, Neil made his way as best he could, with lithe activity, down the well-known slopes of the mountain, clasping ever closer and closer to his boyish breast the light figure with long, damp dishevelled hair of his poor little cousin Effie.

CHAPTER LXIV

THROUGH THE MIST.

STRENUOUS and eager as Neil was, his boyish strength had its limit, and the agitation of his mind probably hastened the moment when he felt compelled to pause, and deposit his burden on the heather. Effie was no longer a dead weight. She had moved and moaned, clung for an instant more tightly than seemed possible with such fragile arms to her cousin, and then made a sudden struggle to be released, murmuring in a bewildered way, "Oh, what is this? I can walk, I can walk!"

She staggered a step or two, and leaned heavily back on his protecting arm.

"Rest, dear Effie, rest," whispered Neil, and he folded and flung his plaid down on the hill, dank with mist and the dews of morning, and softly lowered her to that resting-place. But, as consciousness returned, grief and horror woke anew in Effie's breast. Her poor little pale face grew wild and strange. She stared at Neil with eyes that seemed to him to dilate as they gazed. Then she burst into tears; such tears as Neil had never seen shed in his life, for he had neither known and suffered grief himself, nor witnessed it in others. The calm sadness of his mother was a familiar pain to his loving nature; but this, — this dreadful weeping, — this young thing dissolved in showers of tears, and shaken by sobs, and wringing those slender hands, and wildly looking through the mist to the unseen sky, calling on God for help — was strange and dreadful to him; and what was he to do with her? What could he do?

She wept, she rocked herself backward and forward, like a reed when the storm sweeps over the loch. "Oh, papa! oh, papa! oh, my own father! Oh, to think I shall never, never hear his voice any more! And he said such dreadful things — things to make God so angry! Oh, such things he said, and such dreadful songs he sang — on the hill — in the night — oh, my poor father! my miserable father! oh, dreadful, dreadful things! Oh, God forgive those songs, and all the words he said! He was ill — he did not know. Oh, Neil, cousin Neil, do you think God will forgive? — the terrible God! oh, my father! I hear him — I hear him singing still! Put no, never again! never again! I shall never hear him again! Those dreadful words are the last, the last, the last!"

And the weeping grew more convulsive; and the young heart that beat in Neil's breast seemed as if it would burst for very

pity. "My mother shall take you," he muttered, as the only comfort he could get of. Then, as he looked despairingly at the wild plants on the wild hill where those two young creatures sat in that mist of morning, he suddenly pressed his little shuddering fingers in his warm eyes and grasp.

"Effie," he said, "oh, Effie, try and rest. I cannot tell why it should come to me now — I have not thought of it for years — memory of a little tradition my mother told me, long, long ago, when I was a child. It was a rider, a bad wild man, a robber, I think, who was careering over ground like this, rough, full of granite stones and stony places, and his horse threw him, pitched him right overhead, and all that time who ran to help him heard was a faint curse and a groan, and then silence. For he was dead. But when they came next place, there was a strange plant growing in a tall thistle with variegated leaves streaked with white, and upon the leaf, in irregular characters, these lines were traced: —

'Betwixt the stirrup and the ground,
Mercy was sought — and merry found.'

My dear Effie, the story is a little wild, but God's endless mercy is no fable. Moments to Him may be years of ours, and years of ours are but seconds to Him. He knows the thoughts that would have changed the heart. He knows if the dying man have lived a better life, — and lived to see Him. He knows, — oh, Effie, are you weeping still so bitterly; will nothing calm you?"

"Oh, my father, my father! The dreadful, dreadful words!" sobbed Effie. "I dread, dreadful night! Oh, my heart broken; my heart is all dark, for ever and ever!"

As she spoke, as she sobbed, as she rocked to and fro, suddenly the mist lifted; the equalled loveliness of that sight, only to be seen in the Highlands and among similar mountain scenery, burst on the gaze of the young lad, and the desolate girl by his side. The golden glory of sunrise broke over the floating clouds; the leaden sky turned blue, and rippled with silver in the far-off falls of Torrieburn, the white snow of its dwelling-house, the lovely towers of Glenrossie, and even the grim grey volcanic rocks of Clochnaben, all caught a gleam of the tinging rays; and Neil's best face — as he turned in wonder and admiration to this opening of the golden gate of morning — brightened with a rosy flush.

of emotion and half of the reflected light, and never looked more beautiful. Even Effie ceased to weep. A strange awe conquered sorrow for the moment. The large wild eyes, with their arrested tears sparkling on her pallid cheek, looked also at that wondrous glory of Nature; at the rolling veil of mist and the breaks of light under, the warmth and life that were stealing into the cold night-saddened scenery, and changing all as in a vision.

"Oh!" she said, "it is as if we saw it all from another world! Light has come."

"Yes, Effie," said her cousin, as he slowly turned from the radiance and fixed his earnest gaze on her face, "light *has* come; and so also mercy will come; 'Post tenebras, lux;' after the darkness, light. Doubt all the worth and goodness of man; doubt all things on earth: but never doubt the mercy of God in heaven, for that is *SURE*."

And as he spoke, they both rose, and struggled down the precipitous sides of the hill hand in hand, or Effie's steps supported in difficult places by Neil's arm; till, weary, bewildered, exhausted, but with a sense of protection and consolation hovering round her, she reached at length the house of Torrieburn.

"The two cousins waited there together — oh, awful waiting! — for the return of that senseless weight which had gone forth a living man — for the return of those sent to seek the poor sinner who had passed away in the blank night singing blasphemous drunken songs on the hill-side — for Kenneth, no longer master of Torrieburn; no longer grieved, or glad, or offending, or suffering, or existent among men — for the solemn coming of the strong-limbed Highlanders, who had gone to aid the keeper in the carrying home of "THE BODY."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BOUNDLESS MERCY OF GOD.

BUT when those strong men came, — with heavy, even dreadful tread, — the burden that they bore was not a corpse! The doctor met them on the threshold, and Neil met them there, while Effie sat cowering in an inner chamber, feeling as if she had but one sense left — the sense of hearing, and that the beating in her ears disturbed even that.

The doctor met those men, and helped to lay their burden on a bed; and watched, and studied, and examined, and spoke in an under-voice to the old keeper, and kept silence for a little while, and watched again with

downcast eyes; and held Kenneth's clay-cold hand, and laid his own on Kenneth's heart. And then he spoke to Neil.

And Neil gave a short wild cry in his excitement, in his gladness, and rushed to that miserable room where slender Effie sat despairing and listening.

And innocently, in his boyish exultation of better news, he took that little dishevelled head and drew it to his bosom, and kissed it as he pressed her fondly to his breast — kissed it on the shining hair, and on the white smooth forehead, buried as the pale face was on his beating heart.

For Kenneth was not dead! He might live, or he might die; there was congestion of the brain, and danger, and horror, and all evil chances possible. But he was not dead!

"Effie, your father is not dead!" So spoke young Neil; and Effie, after the first throb of bewildered surprise, heard him and blessed him, and flew to that father's side whom she had so dreaded to see again; and smiled wild smiles at those Highland bearers; and flung herself into the old keeper's arms, and kissed his face and horny hairy hands, and called down God's blessing "on him and his;" and wept and smiled again, and kissed him again, till the old keeper wept too, and called her a "daft lassie," and lifted his bonnet from his honest pious brow, thanking Almighty God for His "special mercy that day."

That day; ay, and that night.

For in the dead of night — the third night — Kenneth awoke; awoke from his senseless slumber, and his heavy half life. He looked around him at visible objects: a dim light lit the room.

The hired village nurse who was there to wait upon him had sunk into a midnight sleep. Her wrinkled face — seamed with lines of care from obscure sorrows unknown to those who employed her — was sealed in that deep, fatigued slumber which nothing short of the cry of "Fire," or some equivalent event, could be expected to disturb. She was not watching: she was dreaming of watches more dear, more intimate, more sorrowful. She was dreaming of her own dear ones, her own lost ones, before she came to watch strangers for hire, withered and weary, and buried in sleep.

And another sleeper was there — Maggie! Maggie, who had been sent to in all haste, and had returned in wild hurry with the messenger. For she had kept her word well, had Maggie. Kenneth, imperious, insolent, oppressive to her old doited father, had been an exile from her heart. She had not seen his once-loved face for many a day;

she had stayed, as she said she would stay, with her parents. But Kenneth ill and dying in the cold mist on the hill-side, Kenneth suffering, and ruined, and alone, was once more suddenly her idol and treasure, "her ain bairn and bonny king o' men." She was ignorant, erring, homely: but love is grand, and holy, and divine; and mother's love, as it is the first, so also in its intensity is it the strongest upon earth. Lovely as is the scriptural promise of complete union between truly-knitted husband and wife — "they twain shall be one flesh" — a higher comparison yet waits on mother's love. No fleshly union is spoken of there, but it is made akin to, and one with, the eternal Spirit of God: "As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Inspiration itself gave no more perfect image of love divine. Maggie, then, was there to nurse and comfort Kenneth; cradle-love was with the man forsaken by his untrue Spanish wife, and by the careless friends of dissolute hours; cradle-kisses were once more showered on his brow, and cheek, and pale, swollen lips. And even now, though animal nature preponderated in poor Maggie, and the anxiety of her soul failed to keep her body waking, there was something intensely fond and maternal in the attitude of her leaning head, with its rich masses of golden hair, scarcely yet dimmed with streaks of grey, and the large white arms and claspings hands stretched, even in slumber, across the pillows that supported the unconscious form of her Absalom.

She slept, and the nurse slept — heavily, profoundly.

But there was one sleepless watcher in that room. Effie had been put to bed; Maggie herself had assisted in that ceremony; had first boxed her weary ears for weeping and wishing to stay up, and had then sat down on the narrow bed, and wept with her loudly and grievously; till Effie had almost felt the new mystery of jealousy creep into her soul, as she had felt the new mystery of Death, at the evidence of a love for her father whose passion was so like her own.

And in the silent watches of the night, when the dim light was burning and gleaming down on those other sleepers, and no sound but their heavy breathing made life in the room, Effie glided from her inner chamber, and stood, pale and sad and slender, in her white night-dress, by Kenneth's bed-side.

Then it was that, as he opened his eyes, conscious of outward sight and sounds, he saw her like a white angel ascend and lightly kneel upon his bed; facing him, but with

eyes upturned to Heaven, while the fervent sorrowful tender voice sounded in his ears, speaking brief sentences broken by repressed sobs. "Oh God, dear God! let me be lonesome always, — or let me die in pain, great, wretched pain, — but let papa live; let be a good man, — let papa live, and let me die instead. Amen."

Such were the words that greeted Kenneth, or seemed to greet him, in the dawn of night. Sweet mournful voice — sweet but mournful face! Is it a vision or reality haunts him now?

It is reality, Kenneth — it is your own orphan child — your young helpless daughter, praying thus to God.

All of a sudden, as comes a flash of irradiating light, there came to Kenneth's soul a consciousness unknown before. This was indeed, his child — his own flesh and blood, and spirit; part of himself; the better, more innocent part of himself. And she was praying — not for herself, not for herself to her own life, but for HIM. Willing to suffer, to be in "wretched pain," for his sake; to save him; to rescue him from some unknown evil; from the wrath of God!

With a feeble hollow voice, in the dark and darkness of night, Kenneth called to his child. "Effie, my little Effie, is it you?"

"Oh, papa! oh, my blessed and beloved papa, yes; oh, father, yes, it is I! I am here."

Then Kenneth said, with a groan — "For me, Effie — I dare not pray for myself. 'Pray for me.' Who shall doubt that God permits children to be our angels on earth? 'I say to you, that their angels always behold the face of our Father who is in heaven.' ALWAYS. Not in the glimpses, as to our baser and more clouded natures, but always. Oh blessed privilege, of dwelling in the light that never withdrawn!

So in the murky night, while the orphan and poor Maggie slept, God's angels were and the slender child, dawning towards manhood, woke also, and prayed for her wretched father.

And it seemed to Kenneth as if he saw from his eyes while she prayed. His weakness his, insolent insubordination, his passion for Gertrude, his want of tenderness and pity to his poor mother the loving Maggie, with all her faults and her virtues; his ceaseless ingratitude to his uncle; all smote and stabbed his heart sharply as a two-edged sword. God's mercy was dealing with him; God was speaking to him with that mysterious voice heard by the first sinners in Paradise.

"walking in the garden in the cool of the day." And in that midnight hour, on the wings of that child's prayer, the repentance of Kenneth went up to heaven. "Have mercy, Lord, and create a new spirit within me," was all poor Kenneth said, for he was unused to prayer.

But God asks not for human eloquence. The publican who smote on his breast with the brief petition, "God be merciful to me a sinner," went down to his house justified rather than the other. "God forgive me, was Kenneth's murmured prayer. "God have mercy on my dear, dear father," was Effie's simple reiteration of yearning petition. Did the angels hear and bear it to the foot of the Almighty's throne? — Assuredly they did. And in the morning Kenneth lay sad, and weak, but sensible, with his little Effie by him; and he scrupled not to own to that devoted child that he felt as if he had been blind all his life; and that suddenly God had healed him, and caused him to see the selfish, sinful, strange rebellious course which he had taken continually in the bygone years. So Kenneth repented in feebleness, bitterness, sickness, and unbleness, never to be the same man again; but with a deep and true repentance, objectly sincere. There are resurrections on earth other than the one which leads to death to immortality. There are illustrations of God's beautiful emblem of divine range in the bursting of the dull chrysalis to let the winged Psyche forth, other than the one illustration of confined clay, from which the imprisoned soul escapes and ascends to glory.

The lesser resurrections, of our world, we daily round us. Memories of good; and words of forgotten prayers; and voices of friends neglected; and lessons of life from which we turned impatiently, as children from dry tasks — these all may rise again; in no spectral light, but clad in beams of glory; rise, like the fountain in the desert that quenched the thirst of perishing Ishmael when all around seemed a barren sand; rise, as the good thought rose in the dissolute prodigal's heart when he fed the foul swine despairing; and turn our steps back, like his, into the long-forsaken track of peace, which will lead at last to our Father's mercy and heavenly home.

"God has given me the treasure I least served," Kenneth said, as he lay with his weak hand locked in his mother's, and his other caressingly folding his child's head on his cheek. "I have this good dear child; and I was such a bad son to you, mother!"

And poor Maggie's wide blue eyes opening in mingled amazement, pity, and passionate affection, she answered in a sort of confused rapture, "O! Kenneth, my lad, I loo ye mair than if ye'd been the best son to me that iver lived; but I'll loo ye mair and mair noo that ye're sae sick and sorry."

And sick and sorry Kenneth continued for a long time. It was not to be expected that such a shock, to an already broken constitution, should pass and leave no traces. He spoke with difficulty; walked with difficulty; a general and unnatural feebleness, such as is often the forerunner of paralysis, deadened his faculties. He leaned heavily on Effie (who loved to be so leaned upon), and told her, with a smile, she was his "live walking-stick." He sat mute and unoccupied; looking out into space, into vacancy; he was no longer the Kenneth they had known, but another Kenneth altogether.

Dear, inexpressibly dear to them! They judged him not; they blamed him not; they desired only to serve and tend him. And Effie's wistful eyes followed and rested on him as a dog watches for his master; and, in all the little household cares and medical appliances that fell to her lot to perform, she "did her spiriting gently," as Ariel in the island of storms before the wand of Prospero was broken.

CHAPTER LXVI.

GERTRUDE HAS A NEW TROUBLE.

WHEN Neil narrated to his mother the events of that agitated morning, he was amazed that she did not express her intention of instantly going to Torrieburn to tend and comfort Effie, — amazed and disappointed.

"Whatever Kenneth has done to anger my father, poor dear Effie cannot have offended him! Indeed, the Torrieburn agent told me of his generous intentions, that in buying Torrieburn it should be settled on Effie: why then can you not go to her? Oh! mother, she is so forlorn and miserable!"

Gertrude wept.

"My boy," she said, "you cannot think I do not pity Effie. You shall write to your father what has happened. When he knows — when he hears —"

She paused, choked with painful emotion.

"When he knows and hears, mother," said Neil, hotly, "he will wonder that all

from this house have not gone to Effie in her distress.

"Forgive me, forgive me, my own dear-est mother!" he suddenly added, as his mother leaned back with closed eyes, through the lids of which the tears she tried to check were stealing.

But he was restless and unsatisfied. He withdrew to a distant window, in the sunny morning room, and took up a book and tried to read. Then suddenly he tossed the book from him, and looked wistfully from the window in the direction of Torrieburn.

"When I am a man," he said, in a proud, resolved tone, so like the voice of old Sir Douglas that it thrilled through his mother's brain, "when I am a man I will *marry* my Cousin Effie, and take her away from all that misery; I have determined on that."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Gertrude; and her startled gaze was fixed on her son, as if measuring the interval between herself and that new misery.

"When I am a man." The tall, lithe, handsome lad who had carried his cousin across the moors, and now stood in such an attitude of proud independence, stating his premature determination as to the most serious matter that can affect human existence!

"When I am a man!" The waters of Marah flowed over the soul of his mother. A new strange visionary perception seemed given to her, — a future in which some other love should be beyond and above *her* love in her son's heart, and be thwarted on her account, for some fault which she was supposed to have committed. Her Neil's heart perhaps following his strong boyish fancy and breaking with grief! For how could Sir Douglas ever agree to a marriage between his son and Kenneth's daughter? And therefore Gertrude exclaimed, "God forbid!" with more passion than she generally spoke.

And it really seemed as if the new misery was dawning from that moment, for Neil's lovely indignant eyes flashed through something very like tears, and his lips trembled as he hastily answered, "Mother, I did not think you could be so cruel! Whatever Uncle Kenneth has done (and of course I see that you also have quarrelled with him, as well as my father), that dear girl can have sinned against no one. She has no mother to comfort her; no lady friend; nothing but Mrs. Ross Heaton. Oh! poor Effie, — poor cousin; if you could have seen her coming down the hill — if you could have seen her pale, pale face and

ruffled damp hair, and damp clothes, in which she had lain on the hill all night! Oh! I must go and see how she is this evening," continued he, excitedly; "I must go. I did so hope you would have come. I thought we should have gone together. I *must* see Effie! I must! I will not be longer away than I can help."

And the passionate scion of a passionate race opened the door of the morning room hurriedly as he spoke; held the lock in his hand a moment, looking wistfully back, as though he half expected his mother to change her mind; and then, closing it hastily, ran down stairs, and out over the hill. Over the boundary line of Glenrossie, where the white heather grew which Effie had sought the day his detested Aunt Allie had struck at her with the little sharp riding whip; he saw it now, flickering a moment in the air, like a snake's tongue, and then coming down so viciously on the thin white shoulder and slender arm! Over that boundary, into the lands of Torrieburn, and on to the Falls, and past the Falls, to the house; and into the sick chamber where Effie watched. Pale weary Cousin Effie; with her small white hands tightly clasped together in her lap, in a sort of agony of uncertainty and anxiety.

He looked at Kenneth, and sat down by her, by the bedside. She answered in the lowest whisper his whispered greeting, and then those two sat silent, hand in hand, for a while; both looking only at the face of the sick man.

Then, when the time for parting came, Neil motioned her to follow him to the outer door, and spoke in his own earnest voice, unrestrained by the necessary quiet of that painful sick room.

"Effie, dear, you look paler than ever: take care of yourself; eat and drink and strive to be strong. You know you cannot nurse your father, or help in any way, if you fall ill yourself. And you will be ill — I am sure you will — if you don't take care."

And the young radiant eyes anxiously pursued the face of the tender girl, and the young heart sighed, still thinking his mother should be there.

"I will come every day, Effie," he resumed; "every morning and every evening. Expect me; I will never fail. I shall have no thought but you, till I see you better."

"Oh! do come," said the young girl faintly. "It helps me so. The morning I do well enough, but the evenings are so

erie; and I dare not make it light enough to read, for the doctor says all should be so dark and still."

"I'll come, Effie."

And with the firm quick words, he stepped lightly from the threshold, and trod with a firm quick step the distance that lay between her home and his. *Her* home for ever! He was glad of that. He loved his father for having thought of that. It was noble, generous, like his father. He comprehended, he knew, how hopeless the helping of Kenneth had been; it was the common gossip of the old keeper and others in the place. Neil could not choose but know it: and bad Kenneth had justly forfeited all right to his estate. But it was a beautiful thought of his father, to forego the possession of Torrieburn, to buy it, and settle it on the ruined man's only child. Ah, what could be the quarrel between Glenrossie and Torrieburn, bitter enough to divide them so? What could make his mother keep aloof from innocent Effie? What?

That mother sat buried in mournful thought, till his return. The evening meal passed away untasted: the book which had been occupying her was unread: and, when Neil's fond good-night kiss was accompanied by a murmured prayer for pardon "if he had spoken hastily before he went out," she shook her head, and returned the kiss with passionate tenderness; but there was no explanation between them.

And, as every morning Neil went out with more restless impatience, a little earlier than the day before, to Torrieburn, and every evening returned a little later, feeding his lingering eyes on Effie's farewell smile, as she stood like a small white statue under the dark fir-trees — Gertrude's sadness deepened more and more; and she wrote a cheerless, anxious letter to Lorimer Boyd, telling him how it was with them all, and her grievous perplexity of heart.

CHAPTER LXVII.

LORIMER WRITES ABOUT KENNETH.

LORIMER BOYD's answer — to adopt the foreign phraseology of the Earl his brother — "ne se fit pas attendre." He wrote by return of post. "Take the boy instantly away from Scotland," he said. "Even if it was understood between you and Douglas (which I cannot see) that he was always to spend his holiday at Glenrossie, and that your enjoyment of his society was limited to meeting him there, the peculiar circum-

stances would justify you in making some different arrangement. Take him away instantly. He is not so young but this fancy may give you more trouble than you can foresee. Part him and that poor child, in mercy to both; and in pity to yourself. I can see that you are ill, in every line of your letter. Leave Scotland; go somewhere to the sea-side, and let dear Neil sail and boat about during the remainder of his holidays. I have written to Lady Charlotte. I hope she will forgive my frightening her a little about you.

"Neil's account of Kenneth may be quite correct, but I very much mistrust it. I don't wish to speak ill of my countrymen, but I never yet saw a remorseful Scotchman, or a penitent Scotchwoman. The Caledonian mind takes quite a different view of the condition of souls (or at least of their own souls) from that generally taken by Christian folk. Something of the energetic obstinacy with which they pursue worthy and estimable aims overflows and tinges their notions of conduct less praiseworthy. We are told that we should be prepared to give a reason for the faith that is in us. A Scotchman or Scotchwoman is always prepared to give a reason for the *sin* that is in him or her. Justification by faith with them means faith in their own justification. And this not only individually, but for all of their own kith and kin. It is quite astonishing to see a whole family of the severest pruders placidly contented with their family sinner, and convinced that *her* sin was, and is, most rationally excusable, even while hunting full cry after some alien outsider who does not belong to them. I am sure, if *we* had such a thing as a family sinner amongst us, at least of the female sex — I am myself the nearest example of it, I suppose, among the males — that even my mother, whose severity is known to you, would hold all her 'dictums' in suspensa for the occasion. There is an anti-Magdalenism in the Northern constitution. No Scottish Mary staunches her tears with her hair; though those lovely penitents are generally painted with golden locks, possibly to enhance and show the difficulty and value of their repentance: nor does the Scottish Peter go out and weep bitterly under a conviction of his own irresolution in the path of virtue. It is weakness to lose your self-esteem, and weakness is a thing the Scottish mind abhors. We struggle for that self-esteem under the most untoward circumstances; as a man shipwrecked, and losing a hundred times its value, dives down into the cabin for his watch.

"When Kenneth Ross gets better, we may probably see in him a fair illustration of the impressive and agreeable distich —

'When the Devil was sick, the Devil a saint would be;
But, when the Devil got well, the Devil a saint was he!'

"I know this letter will make you angry. I am glad of it. It will rouse you, and do you good. Write and scold me.

"And yet — forgive my bitterness. How can I be otherwise than bitter against one who has caused you so much — such unmerited sorrow? This man may be a true penitent. There may be more joy over him than ever there will be over me, however great may be my needs in that way; but till we see how the fag-end of this misspent life turns out, and how far

'Vows made in pain, as violent as void,'

are held to when pain is over, let us not trust too implicitly to the existence of that angelic chorus which we cannot hear.

"I shall be anxious to know what Douglas writes in answer to Neil's communication. Yours ever,

"LORIMER BOYD."

A tender frightened letter from Lady Charlotte followed, speaking of Scotland as if it had suddenly become Nova Zembla, and adjuring Gertrude to remember that her father had died of consumption, "though he was taken everywhere, dear, to be cured and saved," and with some "inconsequence" following up this dreary admission with the sentence —

"Therefore come at once (or as soon as you can) to the Isle of Wight, where I have already written to take a pastoral cottage" (what Lady Charlotte meant by "pastoral" must remain a matter of conjecture) "very near the sea, and away from people — though I must say I do *that* to please you dearest Gertie, for I do not like living only with shrimps — I mean not seeing one's neighbours; not that one's neighbours are always neighbourly, and I'm sure you have reason to think so; though the ones far off are not a bit better than the neighbouring neighbours; witness my cousin Clochnaben, who has written most spiteful and cruel things even now. And she says Kenneth Ross is *shamming*, in order to get you back again, but you are afraid to go to him now, and all sorts of things of that sort. I'm sure I hope people won't think I took the

pastoral cottage because we were afraid or ashamed either; but I thought you would like it best, and that was my reason, and the first week begins next Thursday; so I do hope you and Neil will set out; and tell him there are two boatmen, and thousands of eggs that he can have. I mean the boatmen, and they will amuse him. The birds sit screaming on the rocks, and I wish they would not, for it has such a melancholy sound; but you like those sort of things. And so God bless you my own dear Gertie, and bring you safe to

"Your affectionate Mum,
"C. S.

"P.S. — I have got such a pretty seaside dress, dark-blue, with a quantity of white embroidery — much prettier than black; and I am pleased with it, though my cousin Clochnaben said she hated that sort of dress, and that it made women look as if they were *tattooed* like savages. Very rude, wasn't it?

"C. S.

"P.S. No. 2. — Get yourself a dark-blue linsey-wolsey, my dear Gertie, and don't cough."

And Gertie read — and sighed — and pondered — and told Neil that she did not feel well, that her mother had taken a cottage in the Isle of Wight for them, and that the rest of his holidays would be spent there. A sentence she pronounced very hurriedly and timidly, possessed as she was by a vague painful expectation of Neil "flying out," and refusing to leave the hills that enshrined his cousin Effie.

She mistook — as we do continually mistake even those we love best. Neil no sooner took in the fact that she had been suffering uncomplainingly, and required this change, than he passionately embraced her, expressing himself in broken sentences of self-blame for "being such a brute" as not to see that she was ill — "so selfish" to require to have it explained to him — "so inexcusable" not guessing that it would be better for her to get out of the cold mists of the hills to a better climate.

And with the last sentence the colour suddenly flushed his cheek, for he thought of Effie; and he looked eagerly in his mother's face, dreaming, "If we could but take my cousin with us!"

But he saw nothing in that sweet face but a look of pain and faintness, now becoming habitual.

His farewell to Effie was sad and fervent.

She was to write every day, or rather every evening, at the hour that would be so blank and dismal when he should have departed; when his active bounding step should no longer cross the moor, nor his strenuous young arm shorten time by rowing the coble across the lake — when the morning light must come, whether in mist or sunshine, without his radiant eyes; and the evening close in, without his comforting voice to cheer her.

Effie wept bitterly. The last he saw of her she was weeping, and turning from his lingering farewell gaze to weep anew within the house.

He thought of those tears all the long day in the railway carriage, starting next morning for England, watching the pale meek countenance of his mother seated opposite to him, and wondering anew what the bitter, bitter quarrel could have been that made Kenneth an alien, and his poor little daughter a banished creature from Glenrossie and the love of its inhabitants.

And his mother, as she stole furtive glances at his restless, passionate, handsome face, felt the cold poison of doubt creep through her heart as she thought,

"Oh! will the day ever come when even my boy Niel shall love me less?"

And she thought, if that day ever came, death would be so welcome.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TRACES OF JAMES FRERE.

LADY CHARLOTTE felt rather ill-used by the increasing ill health and depression of spirits of her daughter. She wrote a somewhat peevish and deprecatory letter to Lorimer Boyd: "I took a pretty pastoral cottage here, as you advised; and indeed only because you advised it, for I don't much fancy pastoral things myself; only, Gertie having such reliance on your judgment and your kindness, I thought it for the best to do as you said. But you are quite mistaken in saying she would be the better for it: she is not the least better, rather worse; and she has a cough that keeps me always remembering her poor father; which is very distressing. I wish you could come from Vienna, for she is certainly better when you are in the way to talk and read to her. I am sure I would read to her with pleasure, but I don't understand or relish the sort of books, and it is not the same thing; and she doesn't care for news, and I don't know what to do with her. She has left off walking, and lies on the sofa looking at the sea;

and all I can get from her, is, "I don't feel very strong to-day, little mother."

"Now, of course, when you told me I should do her good by coming here, all this is very disappointing; and I hope you will write to her and advise her not to fret; for I know she is fretting; and the hard thing upon me is, that she frets more now than she did, though nothing new has happened; and though she used to be so fond of pastoral places, and I have got a cottage at Bonchurch just like the one in Moore's "Melodies," about Love and Hope, you know — where "he opened the window and flew away." The roses climb right over the roof, and so does the clematis, and, except that there are gnats at night (in spite of a little beginning of frost), she might be so very comfortable! I wish we had never come across these Rosses of Glenrossie, for what with their tempers and the things that are said, and Gertrude taking a turn so unexpected, I am quite sick with vexation. I wish she had married any quiet man, — yourself even, — rather than that things should be as they are. Neil is well; and I go out sometimes to see that he don't drown himself. I mean, to see that he has the right boatmen with him; for he is venturesome and reckless to a degree; a Ross all over, and as passionate as any of them; but a dear boy too. And even he can't get Gertrude's spirits up; for she says, 'Oh my Neil,' 'Oh my Niel!' in such a begging voice, it quite makes one's heart ache; and, when he tries to guess what she would have, and says if it frightens her, this boating, he'll give it up — she shakes her head, and says, 'No, dearest, it is not that!' But she never says what it is; and it is so unlike my Gertie to be so unreasonable."

And Lorimer, pondering much over this somewhat *decousue* account of matters, wrote, as lady Charlotte desired, advising Gertrude "not to fret," and showing her why she ought not to fret. And he wrote also to Neil, — a long letter, taking the most vehement interest in the boating and boats, their sailing qualities and tonnage, and narrating adventures of his own in boyish days, and curious anecdotes of various kinds, all more or less connected with this new pursuit. For he thought the eager mind and body of the lad would be all the better for an absorbing occupation of that kind.

He was right.

Cousin Effie's letters came, and were most welcome, and fondly answered. But, after a post or two, they were often pocketed to read "as soon as he should be afloat in the *Sea Gull*;" and the shifting of a sail or

handling of a rope would cause him to look up, and break the thread of Effie's simple and tender sentences; once, indeed, entirely lost to him; for a stiff breeze in rounding a rock, and a sudden rainbow, so engaged Neil's attention, that he suffered the open letter to escape from his hand, and only became aware of the fact, by seeing it flutter and rest like a little white bird on a distant wave, sweep over the next, and then disappear for good.

Even then, Neil bore the deprivation with very cheerful philosophy; sensibly reflecting that he had seen the first line or two, beginning, "Papa is better, and things get more and more comfortable;" and taking for granted that "all the rest of it" was in the same satisfactory strain.

It was on one of the occasions when Lady Charlotte went down to the beach with him, "to see that he did not drown himself," that an event occurred which thrilled her timid soul with extreme terror.

She was walking along a lonely bit of shore by Black Gang Chine, when a man who was sauntering in the same direction came near and joined her, as it seemed, in her walk. He was not a gentleman, nor a common sailor; Lady Charlotte could not make out what he was. She felt a mixture of anger and fear at his self-imposed companionship; and looked anxiously about for Neil; but Neil was nowhere to be seen.

At last she summoned courage, and asked the man which way he was going, whether he "wanted any thing;" "money or any thing?" The man laughed, and said he would be very glad of anything the lady pleased to bestow. But even, after pocketing the half-crown which followed his reply, he continued to walk by her side. "I do mostly walk this way," he said. "I've had a hard tussle with a mate of mine, and I'm on the look-out to see him again. You see, ma'am, I'm a smuggler; or rayther I was a smuggler; but, getting acquainted with a farmer's daughter here, she over-persuades me like to give up them sort of ways; and her father, he made a point of it, saying no man should have his daughter that did not get his livin' in a honest way; and there was plenty of honest ways without smuggling. Well, I resolves to cut the concern, and I goes to my mate (there was two of us) and says, 'Give me my half-share of the value of the boat, for I'm going to leave her!' It didn't please him; and we had a wrangle; and he says, 'Leave you may; but the value of the boat you don't get.' I said I would; he said I shouldn't; and, when high words had passed, he clinched

them with these words — 'She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to take the law of me to get her value; so it's off, like a sneaking fellow as you are. Well, I'd depended on the money for getting things for my Mary, and I thought, and thought, and thought how to be retrace on him; and sure enough in the night I went where the boat lay in the cove ready for her next run, and I sawed, and cut, and worked with a will, I can tell you, till the boat was no more use than spars, and then I stuck up a board with a paper on it with his own words written, against should come: 'She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to take the law of me.'"

"Oh gracious! how could you?" exclaimed Lady Charlotte, looking fast at the stern profile of her unwelcome companion as he walked by her side.

"Well, you see, he was hindering me my Mary. And he was all rags when he come here, when first I put him in the way of earning; and we'd made many a trip together, and he's over to the French now, among friends of mine! I only wished — whatever the wish might be — that Lady Charlotte stopped short in her walk, and stood tremblingly feeling a reticulate for more money. She looked sovereign, with which, in her agitation, she presented him, saying, civilly, "I really am very sorry for you, but you see you can't not — you really shouldn't — be so m'giving!"

Then, as she beheld the very weird sight of Neil approaching with his boat, she recovered herself enough to say a little; and she said, "I thought, at once, that perhaps you were thinking of robbing me, do you know?"

"Well, I was thinking of it," said the man carelessly; "but I didn't know it might be up among the rocks there; whether that very young gent coming mightn't be coming to you; and, besides, you seemed such a harmless soul to be at advantage of. But" —

He stopped suddenly; his eye lit up, flashed like a signal-gun. "By — what he is!" he exclaimed, as he darted to the rough shore. Lady Charlotte looked that direction, and saw two figures — one in the garb of a common sailor, and another neatly dressed in rather a foreign peasant style. They were near enough for her to be perfectly able to distinguish both in face and form; and in the common suit recognised — with extreme alarm — the ever-changing adventurer, James Fraser.

and in the foreign-looking woman, however disguised, most certainly ALICE!

They were landing when she first observed them. On seeing the man who had been the companion of her walk running towards them, they stood still. Then James Frere leaped back again into the boat, holding out his hand to his companion, who lightly followed his example; and he pushed off from the shore just as the breathless smuggler reached the water's edge. The man shouted and swore; Frere laughed, and shook an oar menacingly at him. Then a boy, lying at the bottom of the boat — and a man in her, whom they had not yet perceived — shook out the sail, and with a bound and a dip in the waters she was off again, soon to appear only like a white speck in the distance!

The smuggler stood a while watching that boat as she danced over the waves. Then he slowly returned to the spot where Neil had rejoined Lady Charlotte.

"Good evening, ma'am," he said, "and thank you! As to yon man, I'll have him yet. His things are all here. He'll need to come back before many days are out — I'll give information." And he strode away slowly over the sands.

If Lady Charlotte could have doubted the accuracy of her own vision, all doubt would have been removed by Neil, who, flushed and eager, said to her, as he came up, "There's that man I saw change his clothes in the railway — he's in the boat. I can't mistake him — he has a most strange countenance. It is he — I'll swear to him. Look, Mamma Charlotte!"

"Yes," thought Lady Charlotte, "and I'll swear to Alice Ross." And, when she regained the little gate of the "pastoral" cottage, she passed in very quickly, and told Gertrude the adventure.

"And is it not too dreadful, Gertie, his always coming up through a trap-door in this sort of way? — I mean like a demon who comes up, you know, through a trap-door."

CHAPTER LXIX.

JAMES FRERE IS RECOGNISED BY ANOTHER PERSON.

POOR Lady Charlotte! She was doomed in this tranquil and pastoral retreat to all sorts of agitating scenes connected with the gentleman who thus came up continually, as it were, through a trap-door!

She was standing — as she herself ex-

pressed it — "most harmlessly" talking about the washing of her fine muslins and embroidered cuffs with an old washerwoman, whose pride it was that "she was the principal laundress of these parts, and washed for the principal gentry by the sea-side."

The good old soul continued ironing all the time she talked, and looking down with affectionate smiles upon the linen benefited by her manipulation.

"Ah!" she said, "all the visitors comes to me that *can*; and it's a real treat to me to see the valets, and lady's-maids, and such folk, coming here as soft-spoken as need be, a-begging and a-praying of me to give *their* lady or *their* gentleman the preference — for I can't do all. But I mostly prefers the gentlemen's, and some of them is really wonderful! Lord Sinclair's — his be pretty shirts enough, to iron — werry smooth, soft linen. And Captain Greig's, — them are beauties; all worked across the *breastesses* — to be sure, how they be worked! And Colonel Vavasour's — his be wonderful, too. And Mr. Gordon's — his'n has little frills down the fronts; they be a deal o' trouble, surely, them little frills; but they're a real pleasure to look at, when the Italian iron's been under 'em. And here's a thing was sent me to wash, that looks for all the world like somebody's skin, but was sent here by a woman they calls a West Injian. They did say she was a wild savage — but, if she be a savage, she be wery unlike *my* notion of the creatures, for she's as soft a spoken woman as ever I seed; but this thing is made of pink flannel, to cover her from head to foot, for she shivers with the cold here, and she comes from some warm island — I'm sure I forgets the name — but it's beyond seas, and there's a governor, and he's as good as king there.

"La! if she ain't coming this minute, and I not half ready."

The aged washerwoman ironed with redoubled diligence; but, before the ironing was done, the door of the cottage was darkened, and in came a sad-looking, sallow woman, past the flower of youth, but still with claims to beauty, her eyes passing languidly over all objects as she advanced, as if nothing in life was much worth noticing, and resting at last in quiet contemplation on the pink flannel garment. You saw at once that she was a Creole, but a gentlewoman.

"Is it finished?" she said, with a soft drawl. "Give it me if it is finished."

The old washerwoman passed a final sweep of the warm iron over the sleeves of the garment in question; flattened, folded, and again passed the iron over; and then,

pinning it in a white handkerchief, presented it to the new-comer.

As she did so, the threshold of her cottage was again shadowed, and close to Lady Charlotte — close to the Creole — passed in James Frere, followed by Alice Ross.

The latter started visibly at sight of Lady Ross's mother. Fearless as she was, her presence of mind forsook her. She grasped James Frere's arm anxiously.

"Oh, come away; come away from this place!" she said, in an agitated whisper.

But James Frere was absorbed in another recognition. Another hand lay on his arm, and the languid Creole's eyes were warm with wonder and anger.

"Ah, James, do I see you at last! You cruel James!"

There was an effort on the part of Frere to affect unconsciousness, to affect strangeness; but he also seemed, in the bewilderment of the moment, to lose his self-possession.

"Anita!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you cruel! Anita! And now she has found you, she will not again be left. Oh, James, how could you leave me without one word? To wake and find you gone! Oh, James!"

Alice Ross had hitherto stood speechless and motionless, her glittering eyes only, seeming to have some movement in them, rippling like a green gleam over the ocean wave. But, as the Creole accompanied the last words by a passionate seizure of Frere's arm, she sprang upon her like a tigress, and shook her off, crying with shrill anger, — "Woman, how dare you call my husband JAMES? How dare you call him by his Christian name before me, whatever your intimacy may have been?"

"My intimacy? Your husband?" laughed the Creole. "This man is married as much as law can marry him, to me. I am his wife, — his lawful wife, and I will claim him — for I have a son — even though he deserted me in Jamaica."

CHAPTER LXX.

AILIE SURPRISED.

THERE was a brief, stormy explanation; incontestible and uncontested truths were evolved from Frere's past history; and at last the Creole, coming close to shuddering Ailie, murmured to her in a voice choked with passion, "Are you so mean a spirit? Would you not some revenge? I am his wife. You are nothing but his mistress. Have you children? I have a son. Think

not that I will forego my claim. All is for myself. Will you not prosecute bigamy, as they can in your country? If not, that will I do."

"Nothing but his mistress!" "Nothing but his mistress!" The words beat backwards and forward in Ailie's brain. At last she spoke: she hissed the words through her teeth:

"Deny it!" she said, without looking at him; "deny it!"

"Nonsense!" said Frere, contemptuously. "You must have known it was. In the bitter gossip reported to Sir Douglas it was told. You knew it. Don't be affected. You knew it."

The light in Ailie's eyes flickered like a flame of phosphorus.

"I did not know it!" she said; and then looking the Creole over from head to foot she said, as if to herself, "Did he marry a slave?"

"I am no slave, but a planter's daughter," angrily retorted the Creole, "and you must best keep your contempt for your own position. I am as educated as you are — richer than you are. My father is dead, and I have come to England. I claim my inheritance; but he shall be punished. Many nights of tears — he shall pay them. I will prosecute him by your laws — I will prosecute him."

Ailie looked at the man whose evil influence had joined with her evil, to create confusion in her destiny. A chill tremor seized her.

"Yes," she said, "you shall suffer. I vainly on me when your punishment comes — call vainly. I will crush you, I tread you into the earth. Deceiver!"

Two or three boatmen gathered round the door, attracted by the sound of voices in dispute. Others joined them. Among them came the smuggler. He sprang on Frere and wrestled and strove to hold him. At that moment a knife glittered in the air, grazed the bending head of Alice in its descent, and struck the smuggler's breast; it lifted once more, — the warm blood dripping from its pointed blade on the woman's dresses, and the linen the aged woman had been garrulously gossiping about, — and descended yet more violently. They seized him. "Devil, me go!" he said, and turning, shook himself free, and fled over the shore.

He was pursued, but not taken. Swift-footed, and wiry of limb, he reached an inaccessible crag, lifted a huge broken fragment of stone, and flung it below, scattering his pursuers as it rolled down with dash and

fragments of the rock from one pointed peak to another, and coming at last with a dead resounding thump upon the shore.

When they looked up, he was gone ! Some said he had himself fallen into the ocean, in his frantic efforts to crush those who stood below ; some that he had slid down the smooth face of the cliff, and endeavoured, by swimming and diving, to reach a distant point where there was a pathway which led to the sea.

But this much was certain, that, stare as they would along the yellow curves and indentations of the sandy shore, or up by the grey rocks where the sea-fowl sat mute or see screaming into the air, no object re-

sembling a human form dotted the distance.

James Frere was dead, or had escaped. And Ailie, too, had vanished, when Lady Charlotte at last recovered sufficiently from the horrors of the scene to look consciously on objects near her.

Ailie had vanished. Only the Creole woman stood there ; wiping her bespattered shoulder and neck, and gazing down as in a dream on the smuggler, stretched on the floor ; his strong right hand still vainly clutching the folds of linen he caught as he fell, — caught, as the drowning wretch catches at the bending reed, that goes down with him into the darkness and the depths of overwhelming death.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE BARREN, BARREN SHORE !

It was twilight, dreary, drizzling, cloudy twilight, such as we sometimes endure with a sort of impatient sadness, even when there is no cause for grief, — a twilight that dulls our spirits as it sinks over the leaden sea. Colour gone, — light gone, — warmth gone, — all silent, and wet, and cold. The wind, low and hushed, coming in little fitful gusts round the rocks and hollow caves puffs of weak vapour; no freshness; no wildness in the blast; as if great Nature were, in the words of Shakspeare, —

“ In all her functions weary of herself.”

The tiny lodgings and cottages by the sea were beginning to darken. One after one the glimmering lights went out. The terrified old washerwoman pulled down her sleeves over her bare arms, and looked round with a shudder at the scoured and mopped floor of her dwelling, before she sat down to supper with two gaping friends who had dropped in to keep her company after the awful event of the day. Lady Charlotte was recovering from repeated hysterics in the “pastoral cottage” covered with roses and honeysuckles, and leaning her head on Gertrude’s shoulder was watching, with something like a returning smile, the energetic attempts of Neil to make tea and wait on her and his mother. Far away, at the police-station, quivered the gas-light over the door, and with a ghastly brilliancy shone on the closed shutters of the room where the murdered smuggler’s corpse was lying, waiting for evidence and coroner’s inquest, and some one to own and identify him, and to take some sort of interest in this sudden destruction of a man in the prime of life and life’s energies. And duly, by and by, muffled in a shawl — ashamed of her love, of his fate, of the brawl with some unknown ruffian, his companion in a lawless trade which her father had disapproved and which had now cost him his life — came the decent farmer’s daughter, the Mary of his obscure love-story, to sob, and sigh, and drop short agitated curtsies when questioned by the sergeant of police, and admit that it was some one she knew; some one to whose identity “all at home” could speak. And then she went back to the quiet farm and her parents, and back to her little lonely room, where her half-made wedding gown lay neatly folded, with thread, scissors, and needle-book on the top

of it; and the bright French silk neckerchief (his last gift) hung over the looking-glass; and her Prayer-book and Bible were set on the chest of drawers, with wild flowers drying between their leaves, gathered in their pleasant walk the last Sunday, when she had persuaded him to go to church; that Sunday when her father had shaken hands with him for the first time, and even her mother had asked him if he would stay to tea. That happy quiet Sunday!

And Mary wept and prayed, and wept again, going through that phase of bitter anguish known to more hearts than hers; the lament for one whose death is lamented by no one else; the lament for one thought by others unworthy, but on whom we ourselves pinned many a hope. Unshared was the grief of her patient heart. She knew that her father and mother were sitting downstairs talking over the matter in whispers; sorry for their young daughter; but not sorry — rather relieved — that by this stroke of destiny her imprudent love was brought to a close. So she wept, and made her moan, till, at her tiny lattice window also, the light was put out that made one of the sparks on the land above the shore, — went out, and told no tale of the hopes extinguished within, or that a poor simple girl lay sobbing herself to sleep in the darkness that succeeded.

But on the long cold stretch of the sea-shore stood one who neither wept, nor rested, nor slept. Ailie was there!

Her head was uncovered to the drizzling rain. Her bos, twisted round her slender throat, was clutched at from time to time with restless fingers, as the light puffs of wind waved the dangling ends of the fur. She was shivering, less with cold than intense nervous excitement; alternately moving swiftly and pausing, more cat-like than ever in the dim sad light.

More cat-like than ever! At one moment she would scud swiftly over the damp sands with soundless footsteps, and be lost behind the cliff; then with slow, stealthy, deliberate pace, she would emerge, advance a few yards, and stop: motionless and watchful, yet watching nothing: looking over the sea — the objectless, grey, low line of the undulating sea — with a fixed stare; her eyes gleaming in the faint light; her spare figure making a sort of shadowy column between sand and sky. And thus she would remain till, all of a sudden, the spirit of swift scudding would awake in her again, and send her fitting along the shore with such rapidity that the eye lost her, and only became conscious of her reappearance when

again the stealthy pace, the objectless pause, the long stare at nothing visible, the slight gesture of the governing hand that would vain keep the boat from imitating the movements of animal life when stirred by the capricious air, broke the monotony, and gave something of a less visionary nature to her presence on the gloomy sands.

Oh! very dismal and barren of all hope was that shore to the eyes of Alice Ross. She might recross the sea in that light sailing-boat which had borne her from France; she might put countries and continents between her and her native land; but across the gulf of black thoughts, across the ocean tinged with blood, across the disturbed billows of rage and confusion which tossed her soul, never more could she be steered to any quiet haven. Nevermore!

Nor was she dreaming of quiet; nor desirous of peace; nor pitying any of the actors or sufferers in the strange tragedy of the morning except herself; nor yearning to blot out all that had occurred that day like a bad dream. Active, restless, full of the supple energy of the animal she so closely resembled; sharp and feverish were the workings of her busy brain.

Ailie was not thinking of the terrible past; she was planning a terrible future. She was thinking of James Frere; not as a false lover, a common swindler, a murderer amenable to the laws of his country. No, no; none of these things. She was thinking of him solely as her FREY.

He had had many a narrow escape, but this time his fate shall doom him. He shall not escape AILIE!

Woe to the man who is loved with the passion that has neither tenderness nor affection to soften it! who is loved not for his own sake, but for the selfish sake of the woman who has mated with him! The opposite of that love is hate. The serpent hatched from the Egyptian warmth of that sterile soil is vengeance. Pity and regret and the sad quiet partings of a humbled heart, the unutterable and fiery sense of wrong quenched and conquered by a flood of better and holier feelings, all these things are unknown to such women. Their impulse is to slay Jason's children to punish Jason. They fulfil the scriptural malediction which says, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath for it was cruel."

Ailie thought over the links that had bound her to Frere, and all that she had said, done, and suffered, till a delirium of wild revenge thrilled her brain.

"Don't be affected." "You knew it."

"Nonsense." These were the words of insult he had tossed at her before that other woman, the "Anita," he had recognised! Words spoken, no doubt, to deceive that Creole wife; perhaps to pave the way for reconciliation with her. She was rich; she had boasted of her riches. Every thing over which Alice Ross had power as her own property, she had lent or given to James Frere. The Creole had said that her father was dead; and she was rich, and so had come to England. What though she had spoken angrily at that first meeting? Frere would have power to soften her. He had fled, but it was not clear that he knew that he had killed the man he struck at: it was not clear that he knew he was a murderer. Where would he flee to? that was the question. All his haunts, his tricks of disguise and hiding, his fox-like, craftily-contrived holes, his means of evading and eluding, his daring ways and cunning devices, were they not known to Alice? Had he not himself revealed and boasted of them in the days of their "love"?

Only one thing for ever marked him; the scar on his cruel right hand.

Yes, he was marked. She was glad of that. That would help others to track him, — others not so well acquainted with his manifold contrivances. She remembered the first day she had ever noticed that scar; the day the Dowager Clochnaben had asked him to sketch some architectural improvements for her grim castle.

She saw him now, as in a vision; saw him — as she stood with the drizzling rain damp on her hair, and the leaden sea cold and sad at her feet — seated in the great room at Clochnaben, with all its stately old furniture, its huge comfortable grate, full of pine-logs burning with a scented odour, its heavy shining table on which lay the maps, and books, and the slanting portfolio with blood-red strings from which he took the etchings he had made. She saw his smile once more; that smile when their eyes met; THE smile that told her here was more in the soul of that wandering preacher than was taught by his scriptural texts; and yet she had liked him the better for it, and welcomed with a thrill of passion that irregular and intelligent face as her ideal of male beauty. She saw his hand — that scarred, that forging hand — with its light firm touch, and pencil of power, busy in its task that harmless night. She saw it raised and bleeding in the blue lake by the hut, when he dived for Eusebia's bracelet, and Guiseppe had recognised him and exclaimed against him.

And lastly, in the rapid magic lantern of her shifting visions, she saw him lying in the Highland cottage, simulating to the simple and pious minister the woes of a blind beggar, and cunningly obtaining his assistance and charitable recommendation. She saw the low sunshine gleam in on the tartan quilt of the lowly bed as she sat by him, illumining the edge of the bed-frame, polished and worn by age, the dark green check of the quilt, and the forger's hand, as he held Gertrude's and Kenneth's letters, steadily gazing at the writing with those eyes supposed to be filmed in darkness, preparatory to exerting once again those skilful fingers in their power of imitative art, for the satisfaction of a base revenge on the innocent.

That hand; that thin scarred hand! Clear as the awful image of warning that came out and wrote on the walls of a palace — "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," she saw it rise between her and the sullen sky and cold grey sea that dim and dreary evening. And, as all the passing dreams of her mind faded and vanished, the swift scudding movement returned to her limbs, and flit, flit, flit, went Alice; over the sands, and round the rocks, and up the cliff, and along the narrow pathway; no sound in her footfall, only in the click of the little painted wicket-gate at the garden of the inn where she and Frere had passed the preceding night.

There she paused, and passed in with slackened and furtive tread; looking up at the window of her own room, where a light was still burning. And gathering her dress more closely round her to escape the wet, — which dripped from the late autumn roses and trickled down the cairn-like heaps of huge flints with conch-shells set about them which formed the chief ornament of that circumscribed Eden, — she felt, at last, all the chill which busy thought had deadened as yet to her senses.

So, answering in the negative the question of the sleepy servant-girl, if she would "take something" before she went to bed, she stole shivering upstairs to rest.

And there — in the very chamber where he of the scarred hand had slept in security the night before — did Ailie lay her head on her pillow, resolved that he should die an ignominious death "by the laws of his country." No more meeting with "Anita;" no more insult to Ailie; but death — death — death — and disgrace.

The lingering light at her chamber-window burnt long and low; but at length even

that sign of wakeful life disappeared, — and all along the coast was dark.

The damp drizzle and weak gusty wind of the evening, gradually rose to wild beating rain and wilder storm. The sea rose and the tempest howled. Undermanned and overlaid merchant-vessels — whose owners had to think twice before paying port dues — lost spars and sails, and drove regretfully past havens of refuge; and prouder ships rode out the blast, or took shelter where best they might.

But through the storm, as through the calm, Ailie's fearless eyes watched the darkness; and with a fierce compression of her fingers she muttered every now and then, — "He shall be hunted down, hunted down!"

Long she pondered where to begin the feline watch and pitiless chase. He would not surely go back to France? St. Malo was the haunt of the smuggling companions he had lately consorted with. Would he go to Jersey? It was too small for hiding, and too probable a place for the searching visit of the police. He would go to London! In that vast struggling hive, with its eternal murmur of a working, striving, occupied population, any one might hide and be forgotten. He would surely go to London.

And Ailie made her slender package, and was off at dawn of day, having paid the bill to her nervous landlady before the tardy inquiries of the police as to the young foreign woman who was seen with the murderer the day before — and whose place of lodging had only just been made out — disturbed the small household, filled the tap-room with sinister agitation, and set the hostess herself off in tearful protestations of the extreme respectability of her house, into which, if her account might be trusted, no foot had ever passed that might not have walked in equal procession with the holiest of saints and martyrs.

To London, then, went Ailie, and set her catlike watch at many a ruined hole, and saw the walls placarded here and there with the great words MURDER and REWARD, and read in various papers the variously abridged accounts of the event, — the long details in *Lloyd's*; the brief notice in the *Morning Post*; the stern methodic account in the *Daily Telegraph*; the tiny corner devoted to "Murder in the Isle of Wight," in the superb, and overflowing *Times*.

And still, as she read, the hunger of her starved revenge grew keener, and through the streets she knew of old to be his haunts

she fitted in the dim foggy evenings, as she had flitted over the sea sands; her eyes dilating sometimes as she followed with furtive step a figure resembling Frere's to the door of some low lodging in court or alley, only to close, with an exasperated moan of impatience and disappointment, as she slunk back from the aspect of a stranger.

Pains thrown away; calculations shrewd in vain; for Frere — that man of shifts and expedients — knew too well that the safe thing to do under such circumstances is the one thing you are expected *not* to do; and, while furtive Ailie was prowling wearily through bye-streets and round foggy corners between the Strand and the river, he was sitting fearlessly in gay French theatres and French cafés — his black hair curled and perfumed — dining well and enjoying himself; "waiting for remittances from Madrid;" and getting all current expenses meanwhile lavishly provided for by a young lordling setting out on his first independent tour, whom he had amused and looked after during a very rough and sick passage to Havre, and who had already decided that he was "the pleasantest fellow upon earth." — expressing a hope that (as soon as those remittances should arrive) they might join purses and travel together over the continent.

And James Frere spoke his thanks and made conversation, in very pretty broken English; for he was a Spanish hidalgo for the nonce, just returned from Mexico. And a gentleman's linen may certainly be marked "J. F." whose name is not James Frere, but Marquis José de los Frios.

So Ailie wandered in vain. The streets, like the sands, were barren; and the tide of human events washed sluggishly backwards and forwards over the sunken wreck of her life, but brought nothing to the surface.

CHAPTER LXXII.

GERTRUDE MADE JEALOUS.

THE horror with which Lady Charlotte was seized at the idea of any further residence in the pastoral cottage, "where you see, my darling Gertie, we might evidently any day be most likely murdered in our beds," was so great, that there was no contesting the advisability of removal; and their preparations for departure were accordingly made with as close an imitation of Ailie's haste as the greater multiplicity of objects to be removed rendered possible.

Biting the end of her long ringlet, and trembling very visibly, Lady Charlotte sat watching each successive trunk and carton corded and directed to her town address; smiling nervously at their lids, and repeating to her maid, "You see, Sansonnet, London is such a nice *safe* place — so safe and nice. I'm sure I wish we were there! So very safe; so many policemen, and houses; you know, on each side of one, and no back doors — only the area. These pastoral places are dreadfully dangerous. Dear me! Only to think of what I've gone through! And it might have been any of us! You can't tell what that sort of man will do. It's a mercy he didn't take it into his head to stab us all round. And he isn't caught yet; you know they couldn't catch him, which indeed is all for the best; I mean that if they *had* laid hold of him, of course he would have killed them all. So the sooner we get to London the better. But now don't get flurried, Sansonnet; you are crushing down that white crape hat with *bluets* most dreadfully: just lift the lid. You may have the bonnet for yourself that I wore that day. I shall never be able to look at it again. So horrid. Oh, dear me! Do be as quick as you can, my good Sansonnet, and let us get into safety. I never, never will leave London again. It was Mr. Boyd's idea — not mine in the least. And he said it would do my daughter so much good, and I ask you if it has done her any good at all? Certainly not; only these clever men are so wilful and obstinate. You never can get Mr. Boyd to have any opinion but his own; a little of his mother in him; a *little* of his mother. Obstinate, you know. And now see what has come of it! Murder has been done, and Gertrude not a bit the better. I'm quite glad to get away, and I shall write to Mr. Boyd and tell him so. Horrid! And my darling Gertie so patient too, and quite anxious we should start. I shall certainly write and show Mr. Boyd how wrong he was to advise us to come. Now, Sansonnet, *do* shut the basket trunk! You can iron the dresses you know when we get to town, if they are a little crushed. Anything is better than staying among robbers and murderers — anything!"

And so the fragile lady chattered nervously on; and never gave her ringlet any rest till she sat on the deck of the steamer for Southampton, with her pretty little fringed parasol held carefully over one of the bonnets that had *not* been present at the murder, smiling at every one and at every thing, and repeating from time to time, "I feel so safe, going back, you know, dear

Gertie, don't you feel safe and comfortable? And dear Neil, — I'm sure even, he is glad to be safe, though of course he was sorry to leave his boat and those horrid gulls. But he is to stuff two of the gulls, and they will be very pretty in the dining-room. They won't make that screaming either, after they are stuffed. Ho, ho, he!"

And Lady Charlotte gave a little merry tittering laugh after the last observation, for she was under the impression that she had made a jest; and she felt besides altogether glad and in spirits at escaping thus with life and limb from the dangers of pastoral retirement.

But nothing could make Gertrude Ross feel glad or in spirits. Day by day her melancholy deepened. Day by day her health failed. More beautiful than she had been in early girlhood, her beauty was yet further increased by a transparency of complexion and hectic colour which began now to be habitual.

Her mother saw it with alarm. With alarm she listened to the evasive answers of the physician in attendance; answers evasive and unsatisfactory even to her simple mind, sharpened on this one subject alike by affection and experience. And consoling friends — careless or unconscious of the suffering and fright consequent on their words — told her they "feared dear Lady Ross was going in the same way her father had gone before her;" and that they had known many instances of rapid decline in persons who had been made "anxious and uncomfortable," "when the taint was in the constitution, my dear."

And out of the letters of reproach, appeal, and confused explanation, which Lady Charlotte kept inditing to Vienna, as if Lorimer Boyd was in lieu of Providence, and could keep her daughter alive and well if he only chose to take sufficient pains in the matter, came at last a tender counter-reproach from Lorimer himself; complaining of a certain reticence in Gertrude's letters to him, giving so little account of her own feelings or state of health.

And out of that again a nervous, repressed yet anguished answer from poor Gertrude, not absolutely saying, but implying, that he *could not understand* her state of mind. That he, without those dear and intimate ties which were hers (and yet not hers) could not be expected to comprehend that her heart was torn up by the roots, and that she seemed to herself to be not so much dying, as already dead, in some respects, — dead to all interest in usual things, — and sad, even about her deepest interest, her

one source of joy and consolation, — her adored Neil. And then came from Lorimer a letter so passionate that the colour flushed to Gertrude's temples as she read it; scarcely recognizing, in its impetuous burst, the grave, grim, caustic friend whose reticence on such subjects had always seemed to be far greater than her own.

"You think then, dear Gertrude (for there is no other possible translation of your letter), that there are bounds to my sympathy for you, — that, in vulgar parlance, I cannot understand you? You have said it gently, carefully, sweetly. Where then is regard (less regard than that which I trust you feel for me, your old friend, and your father's friend), we do all of us endeavour as it were to shelter our thoughts in soft words; even to those whose intimacy with us enables them to fling away that velvet scabbard, and leave the thoughts as bare, sharp, and wounding, as before they were slipped into their useless covering. The scabbard is worn in vain for me!

"You are mistaken, dear Gertrude. Dear child of the man I loved before you grew to lovely womanhood, you are mistaken. I feel and know all you imagine may be unknown to me. Do you think I have lived till now, and never loved? Do you think I have not also experienced how difficult it is to bend one's mind even to whole some hopes, before the hourglass of sorrow is well turned, or its sand has begun to fall? that I do not know how miserable a thing it is to struggle with the clinging thought that one might yet be blest with reconciling love, instead of being able to give a person up utterly? The difference between death and imprisonment! The one a prolonged torture, the other only a merciful blow. Do you think I am unacquainted with that sensation of utter indifference to all subjects and events which bear no relation to the object painfully beloved? with that consciousness, that, for aught we care, the earth might crumble with all upon it, as long as standing-room was left for two? I know that love! I know the power that makes all other vexations seem like the raving of a far-off storm to one that is safely sheltered, — the power that can beat, as it were, round the human heart walls so massive that the indistinct thing is the thunder of the world's tempests, while near and dear and sweetly audible sounds the voice whose low music thrills every pulse of our being.

"My dear Gertrude, do not doubt me. You are so much to me! — *even as we are*

—that my life would be barren but for the belief that I am something to you. Do not write me letters reserved in their sorrow and their fears. They make me feel like a miserable alien. I call to you at such times, but there is no echo. I look for you, but I cannot find you. Tell me you think you are dying, tell me your heart is breaking for this miserable madness in our ever dear Douglas (which one day *must* have an end); but do not exile me from your confidence, and bid me stand — after so many years of intimate companionship, — far off, among the group of common friends, who are left to conjecture your sufferings, and ask news of you in vain."

When Lorimer Boyd had despatched his letter, he would have given much to rewrite it. Especially he regretted, yea, was inwardly stung by the memory of the phrase, "*even as we are.*" Would she take it as an allusion to his concealed love for her? Would she notice it, not in words, but by a yet further evidence of reserve in her correspondence? He stood, grim and gloomy, looking over the Bastei on the dotted dwellings of the Viennese suburbs, ashamed, and angry with himself. Would his letter seem importunate and distasteful? Had he said so much, only to produce estrangement between them instead of increased confidence? Ah! idiot that he had been to pass the boundary line he had set to himself for many a long year, and change from the tone of habitual gravity or *persiflage*, to plunge into passionate phrases that might draw down on him a repulse, however gently given.

He tormented himself needlessly. Tender, and soft, and thankful, were all the words of Gertrude's answer. Tender, and utterly unconscious! One timid sentence — expressive of a certain degree of surprise that any one he had "honoured with his love" should have failed to respond — he found there; and one simple allusion to the very phrase he had almost cursed himself for writing: that "*even as we are,*" which had been such a burden of hot lead in his thoughts. She took that phrase to mean the distance that separated them as contrasted with their constant companionship in former days; and promised to tell him all, "even as if we were sitting consulting together, as in the old happy days, in the pretty room of the Villa Mandorlo, how best to spare Sir Douglas pain about Kenneth."

And Lorimer, relieved and half-satisfied, fell back on his old style of letter-writing, and spake no more of pining love or wild

enthusiasms. Common topics, passing jests, indifferent discussions, again filled the many pages that travelled from the distant *chancellerie* to the white hand that broke the seal so languidly, and the sweet eyes whose lids grew heavier each succeeding day.

He strove to interest and amuse; to jest with her, as men will do (and women too) who feel that they have been on the verge of a dangerous confession of an attachment that never can prosper, or which never should have been avowed.

"Vienna is very dull," he said, "so at least I am told. It is at all events very empty. I think of wearing a coat of skins and a conical cap, such as Robinson Crusoe is represented in; and going about with a poll parrot on my finger, looking for a footprint in the Prater or public drive. Mrs. Cregan was here for a short time with her pretty daughter; the mother the most admired of the two. Though, indeed, a fair beauty of Viennese society (with a most German wealth of hair) insisted that the luxuriant brown plaits of the English stranger were 'postiches.' But going to the opera a little hurried and dishevelled was considered tantamount to having walked over red-hot ploughshares, and Mrs. Cregan came off triumphant and completely cleared. The opera is my sole pleasure! You know how I love music; and, though the voices sound thin after the full-throated bubbling richness of Italian singing, these people are on the whole better musicians."

"A backward people, too. We had an alarm of fire the other night, and a prodigious 'incendie' it turned out to be. A whole convent burned down. Any thing worse than the arrangements for getting water on such an occasion, it is impossible to conceive. Here, with the Donau carrying the Danube into the heart of Vienna, it was brought in *barrels* such as serve to lay the dust in other cities. The fright of the crowd was extreme; and the rushing about of water-carts and engines, with men standing up in them, holding immense pine torches, scattering sparks and flakes of fire as if handing about samples of the destruction going on wholesale, made a picture very strange, and not very edifying to my unaccustomed eye."

"I heard an interesting anecdote at the Hospital for the Insane. A poor young lady there, quite mad, but gentle (mad 'for being forsaken,' as her attendant assured me), had yet so much of rational system left in her bewildered brain, that she regularly and daily taught the child of one of

the keepers to write and read,* and heard her lessons with the most methodical care. I was much touched by the story; that wandering mind, unfit to associate with grown-up people, still keeping so far in advance as to be of use to an ignorant child; shut out too, from usual companionship on earth, and (according to our views) irresponsible for her actions in the eye of Heaven, yet able to train another mind in some degree to knowledge and duty.

"I will tell you nothing more to day; but you are to tell me all about yourself and your health. ALL, — or I shall write and complain to Lady Charlotte, who always writes and complains to me when you are not well, till she has almost brought me to think it somehow my fault when you cough or have bad headaches.

"Yours ever,

"LORIMER BOYD."

And in the process of their "infamous correspondence," as Lady Clochnaben termed this interchange of letters, Gertrude did struggle to tell him all, — all that she felt or feared for herself, for Neil, for her gentle little mother, and much of what she felt and feared about Sir Douglas.

Only one thing Gertrude kept buried in her heart, and yet it was the bitterest pang of all. She had grown jealous. A new miserable pain had risen like a flickering tongue of fire, and seared where it touched.

Sir Douglas had been ill, very unwell indeed: the hardships that were trying so many fine constitutions round him, and were borne so bravely by all, told on a frame stricken by anxiety and vexation. His eyes, too, had suffered. He had scarcely been able to read or write for some time. In this condition he had, he said, received much kindness from one of the officers' wives who had come out to join her husband. He did not say much of this lady, except that she sang to him. She "had one of the sweetest voices he had ever heard," and had written some of his letters for him.

Human nature is human nature, and, dreadful as it used to be to Gertrude to think of her husband lonely in his sadness and suffering, it was more dreadful still to dwell on the picture thus conjured up of his being tended, consoled, charmed, by another.

All day long, and in her mournful dreams, Gertrude's feverish imagination dwelt on the circumstances. What was she like, this rival

unknown, who took her place, and usurped her duties? She must be young and her Voices fade, like all other things; the melodious tones grow flat and hoarse and weak in age, and this was "one of the sweetest voices Sir Douglas had ever heard" — one of the sweetest. Oh! had he yet some memory of hers? Had he forgotten the Sabbath singing so cruelly commented upon by Dowager Clochnaben and the hypocrite James Frere, when she, his wife, soothed the hours made weary with the same pain, at the same deprivation of common occupation?

Could he hear sweet singing, and forget hers? Forget his own praises, his own emotion, and how his first declaration of love had been at Sorento the sequel, the blood-stained sequel, to the song that died away in silence over the moonlit sea?

How often since had he praised her voice! How often! Was that praise now the portion of another! Was he to love again. To be loved as *she* had loved him?

She had her visions of the past, like Alys, but oh, how different? She saw her and Sir Douglas in those blessed happy days. She saw the dreamy love in his eyes while listening to some favorite ballad: the silent thankful smile of approval and delight as it came. She felt the pressure of his cordial hand. Once, so vivid and so painful was the vision of all this given to another, that with a sharp wailing cry she stood up in her lonely chamber, extending her arms in despair; and wildly on the absent, "Oh love! oh husband! oh Douglas!" till Lady Charlotte came, flurried and frightened, in her white dressing-gown, and asked her what had happened; and pitied her, but also scolded her for "letting her mind dwell so on a man who after all had been so very ungrateful and foolish, yes, foolish, she must say so; and she didn't care who heard her, or thought the contrary; and she wished she had never seen Sir Douglas nor Kenneth, nor any of the Rosses; for they were worse than ghouls and demons, and had brought nothing but misfortune into the family."

And all this Gertrude kept in her aching heart when writing to Lorimer; as he kept also in his angry heart the announcement of the same news by his mother; who triumphed and sneered, and called Sir Douglas "a very gay old gentleman," and said "it was a pity when folk didn't know their own mind; and if they chose to have young wives instead of just being content with a good nurse and a flannel nightcap, they should put up more quietly with the consequences; that was her dictum."

* A fact.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

FRERE'S LODGINGS DETECTED.

THE most humble instruments are sometimes the means of Heaven's perpetual wrath.

In the midst of Frere's charming *sejour* at Paris, — his daily feasts, his nightly carouses, his "quips and cranks and wreathed smiles," and delightful companionship with his wealthy young dupe — a little commonplace accident once more sent him into space, a forlorn and hunted vagabond, ready for all chances which Ailie might prepare, or his luckless destiny entail on him.

The young lordling looked out for a courier "with excellent recommendations." He found one. The courier especially recommended to him was an Italian, speaking very good English and French, active, energetic, and having lived already not only as courier but in regular service in an English family — an affectionate devoted sort of fellow, who had nursed his master in illness, and energetically attended him in health — and who, in due course, presented himself for examination and inspection.

The lordling was pleased and so was the courier. The engagement was made; the day of departure fixed; the route planned, and nearly decided upon.

To end all uncertainty on this latter point, the "most amusing fellow in the world," the Marquis de los Frios, who was to be travelling-companion and friend on the occasion, was called in.

The courier looked eagerly at the Marquis, and his countenance fell.

The Marquis also looked at the courier.

"Signor Frere!"

The mock Marquis would fain have braved out the recognition; but to be recognized now was not the light matter it might have been in former days. He stood his ground with admirable self-possession while in the presence of the courier and his new master. If a man could have been cheated out of his very senses, the courier would have faltered in his conviction, so perfect was Frere's unconscious bearing, so excellent his broken English mixed with words of Spanish origin. But the courier was our old friend Giuseppe, the coral-diver of Naples. His bold, sunburnt, honest, handsome countenance quailed not, nor altered one jot, as he gazed in Frere's face.

When the latter left the room "to fetch a journal in which there were maps of the route he had formerly taken by Switzerland to Italy," Giuseppe rapidly and resolutely

laid bare all he knew of the impostor thus suddenly met again after a pause of years. The incredulity of the lordling was great, — so great, that with the happy sauciness of boyhood he rose at last, saying, "Will you stay here, my good fellow and let Los Frios just confront you, and put you down with an unvarnished account of himself? If you wern't yourself a foreigner, you'd know that this gentleman couldn't be English; couldn't because he hardly speaks English well enough to be understood, unless one was used, as I am, to this sort of lingo."

And so the young lord left Giuseppe, patiently waiting; and did not try his patience long, but returned in about five minutes with a puzzled exclamation of "By Jove!" which comprised all he liked to say on the occasion, having found Frere, *alias* Los Frios, departed, and a pencilled note in a very neat gentleman-like hand, informing him, that, remittances *not* having yet arrived from Madrid, and these sort of stories being embarrassing for a stranger, and most difficult to disprove in a place where one had no acquaintances, he had thought it best to renounce the idea of their mutual tour, and go at once to Spain. That he was sure, under the circumstances, his friend would find no fault with his availing himself of a portion of a bag of Napoleons obtained for travelling purposes the day before. He had not yet counted the pieces he had borrowed, but would do so in the railway carriage, and strenuously advised him to be very cautious as to the man who had pretended to recognise him (Frere), for that he never saw the man before in his life, and he must have had some motive in thus endeavouring to get rid of a third party on their travels.

And now James Frere really did come to London, having first cleverly arranged to *derouter* the police in Paris, by taking a ticket by rail for Madrid, and ostentatiously showing himself at the proper station for such a start.

How or when he disappeared from that station, no one could have said. But an infirm old gentleman arrived by the Havre packet for Southampton the night of that day, and from Southampton went to London, very anxiously and timidly asking his fellow-passengers to recommend some quiet hotel, and advise him about lodgings, having just arrived from America on anxious business which might detain him some time in the great metropolis. And he also begged to know where was the best place to get American money changed, for though he had, of course, bills on bankers in England,

yet he would be glad to get dollars and such like turned into silver; as to Australian sovereigns, he believed they were good and correct for use in England. And both dollars, and notes, and sovereigns were displayed, and much good-natured assistance tendered in the way of advice; and the infirm old gentleman accepted the card of one of his advisers, who kindly offered to call next day and see if he was comfortable, and if he could do any thing for the stranger; and then the old gentleman got into a cab, and was driven to an eating-house, from which, having taken some refreshment, he sauntered forth on foot, and turned to cross Waterloo Bridge. He paused on the bridge, and leaned over, looking into the water. Wrapt in contemplation he seemed, and of a sorrowful character, for he often sighed, and covered his face with his hands.

And as the various passengers across the bridge passed on, and others succeeded, a magical change came over his face; and when he turned once again to cross the bridge in the opposite direction, though still elderly, he was no longer infirm, but a jolly, radiant sort of personage, who looked about him, and could have taken part, at a moment's notice, in a frolic or a fray, and paid a saucy compliment to any unprotected female he met.

But AILIE saw him.

And patient was the watch she kept, as he tried one lodging after another; patient the ear that listened when he told the landlady where at last he fixed himself, that he was "dining out with some friends, and would return at night," and handed her an earnest in advance on the price of his lodgings before he walked away. The red cross that marked the doors in the fatal days of the Great Plague of London told no surer tale of certain death and misery than the invisible notice from Ailie's watchful gaze on the door of that house.

At last! At last he was earthed. Another night; or less; *half* a night; enough of night to put an end to whatever wassail he was about to engage in, and bring him back to the trap set for him, and shut out all hope of escape.

She had now to go now and communicate with the police.

That was all.

And with the swift scudding that took her over the long sands by the Black Gang Chine, she threaded her way through the crowd, reached the police station, and laid her information.

Frere's lodging was detected. His fate was sealed.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

AILIE BAFFLED.

It is not only in pleasant things that the proverb holds good, "There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip." Ailie was doomed once more to be disappointed. Frere never returned to those lodgings; although the forfeit money remained with his expecting landlady; and that personage, after pondering much over the question, "Why tarry the wheels of his cab?" supplied his place with another lodger, keeping a pleasant little apology ready cut and dry to be offered (with her unlut second floor), should the defaulter turn up in a few days, and the delay turn out to be "a case of illness or something."

But Frere was by no means ill. His wavering star was once more for a while in the ascendant. He had made another *rencontre* as he walked towards the parks, certain not to be recognised.

He met his Creole wife.

She was walking, handsomely dressed, from the gate of Kensington Gardens to a carriage.

He did exactly what Ailie had conceived possible; he resolved to appeal to her compassion.

"Stop, for God's sake," he whispered. "I am James Frere; I have wandered in disguise for days, in hopes to see you" (this was a pleasant fable). "You can denounce me; but I am your son's father, a miserable man (here she paused, and faltered in her march onward. He saw it, and continued eagerly and sadly); "a man worn out with life's struggles, ready to die, but not by the hangman's hands. Turn back into the garden! Give me ten minutes for dear life's sake. You shall never be troubled with me more, Anita, after that."

Abject, humble, imploring; the great dark eyes she dared not meet fixed in greedy scrutiny and hope of pity on her downcast face.

She paused — she hesitated — she turned — and re-entered the gardens with Frere at her side. He led to a solitary bench under some trees; and there he pleaded with the woman who had once loved him, and had mourned his desertion with bitter tears.

Plausible, fiery, eloquent, — a most consummate master of all the tricks of speech by which favour can be won or condemna-

tion averted, he made way once more into the yielding heart that listened. He falsified his whole life; his reasons for leaving her, his trials and persecutions, his long imprisonments, the anger of her relations. As to love, he had known other women, but never really loved, except herself. He asked for no love — only aid to escape to America or the West Indies. She could give it. She could be his saviour, his guardian angel. Some day, when her boy was old enough to understand, he would bless her a thousand times over for saving him from the heritage of indelible shame consequent on the disgrace and despair of his father. The smuggler's death need not be the horror to her that it was to the Englishwomen who witnessed it. Only in England is such a calm value set on human life. Thousands of soldiers die on the field as suddenly. Every bullet has its billet. He did not mean to slay the man, but to shake himself free: he was maddened and bewildered by meeting her. He scarce knew what he did at the time. Any way, if he was the veriest wretch that ever burdened earth, she had loved him once, and by that love and by her child's life, he besought her pity, — her pity, and nothing more. So that, in the onward years when she was happy and blest, she might think of the miserable wanderer who had gone to die in the Far West, and rejoice that she, at least, had had compassion in the sorest need of his hunted and persecuted life.

"I live," she said at last, "in Manchester Square. Take an apartment near there, and I will come and see you, and talk of possible things and ships that will sail soon." There was a pause, and she added in a low voice, "Do not be miserable!"

"Do not be miserable."

She did not belong to the class of women who slay Jason's children to punish Jason. She had melted. The exulting blood bounded in the man's heart. Gaining so much, he might yet gain more.

But Ailie also had thought over "possibilities." And among those possibilities she classed the meeting with this lost Anita. She had ascertained her name, or the name she went by, from the people of the hotel in the Isle of Wight, and her address in London.

The day came, and the hour, when Frere was once more within reach of her cat-like spring. He had not left in any ship. He was in the lodging near Manchester Square, and Ailie, prowling near the Creole's house, saw her go forth in the late dim hours always in one direction. Then she made

sure that Frere would fall into her hands. She watched, and watched, and watched.

Oh! not in vain this time. She saw him: saw him looking from the balcony of a well-built comfortable house, and saw the Creole enter.

Ailie never prayed; or she might have prayed then to keep her senses, so fluttering and leaping were the pulses of heart and brain. Afraid to leave, and miss him, as on that former occasion, she stood wistfully considering, and looking about for a policeman on his beat to call the detective who was watching in Manchester Square.

She saw one advancing, and went swiftly up to him. She spoke in a hurried breathless tone: "In there" (pointing to the house) "lives the man who committed that murder in the Isle of Wight; you will get a reward — here is the placard; go in and take him."

While the man stood hesitating, muttering something in a doubtful and surprised tone about a "warrant," and "speaking to the sergeant of the force," the Creole passed out again. Her veil was down, and she moved slowly and sadly with her handkerchief to her face as though weeping. Her dress brushed lightly against Ailie's as she went by, and the latter drew back from the contact with an angry shudder.

"Go in now," she said to the policeman in a hoarse whisper, "the servant-girl is still standing at the open door: there is a large reward, I tell you. Here is your sergeant coming."

The detective at this moment joined them. The two men advanced, and Ailie followed. They passed together up the stairs, and opened the door of the sitting-room. Frere sat at the writing-table, with his back to them, apparently too intent on his occupation to notice the intrusion.

The detective moved forward a pace or two, touched him on the shoulder, and stepped back again, as if prepared for any show of resistance he might offer. But nothing of the kind seemed impending. He rose quietly and slowly, and turning round deliberately, faced Ailie Ross. She gave a cry, and darted to the door.

"It is not the right person," she exclaimed. "They have changed clothes; he has escaped! Follow him: he cannot have got far! *This is a woman!*"

"Yes," said the Creole, as she fixed her large dark eyes scornfully on Alice. "I am a woman, though I wear the garb of a man; and you, you are a tigress, perhaps, though you wear the garb of a woman. He saw you from his balcony. *He saw you!*"

CHAPTER LXXV.

GERTRUDE IS CALLED TO A STRANGE SICK-BED.

It was some days after this strange scene that Gertrude was lying quietly on the sofa in Lady Charlotte's drawing-room, on a Sunday evening, reading extracts with Neil from an album lent to him by Mrs. Cregan.

"Mother, darling," the boy said with a smile, "this is just the book for you. Here's a whole batch of things about the poor.

"Treatment of the Poor in Workhouses; Improvidence of the Poor; Texts recommending the Poor to our loving Care; Debts of the Poor, and Payment by Installments; Amusements of the Poor. Oh! I say, I like that,—*amusements of the poor!* Do they go to plays and pantomimes, I wonder? Oh, no!—here it is,—it's all about walks and fresh air, and opening of gardens, and so forth. Here, here's rather an interesting bit: I'll read it to you, darling mother; you lie still. Is your shawl over your feet? Not too heavy? Good. Now, then, here goes. It is somebody writing about opening the Botanical Garden in Edinburgh on Sundays, and he says,—

"I think that when the educated undertake, even "on principle," to curtail the innocent pleasures of the uneducated, they should consider whether the deprivation is the same to the two classes. I affirm that it is *not* the same. The educated man, the scholar, has perpetual gardens in his memory, in his books, in association of cultivated ideas. The uneducated or half-educated man depends on the positive, on the visual, for enjoyment; and in a still more intense measure do the poor require the positive and visual. An educated scholar may pass a Sunday in his study easily, in meditation and prayer. A poor mechanic *cannot*. The other is richer than he. Not only richer in the fact that he has a warmer house, more adorned apartments, the power of ordering some vehicle, if the weather be downpouring when he wishes to shift the scene,—but richer in *ideas*. The educated man condemns the uneducated man to a certain number of blank hours when he deprives him of outward associations. Set a child to meditate. A child *cannot* meditate, nor bear the oppression of unoccupied time beyond a very brief period. Neither can the poor man. His holiday is as necessary to his soul as a meal to his body. His hungry spirit lives on simple things. Your educated

mind feeds on complex things, which is cannot obtain. Like the sick man,—

"The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise."

"It may be a fit occupation for you to sit through the day without such refreshment. You see the wonders of God's thought. Let him see them where God sets them for his simpler creatures. The flowers that bud and die, holding a sermon in their very hearts,—the grass that withers away like a man's life,—is the contemplation of such things a sinful pleasure, because to him a more intense and rare enjoyment than to you? When he beholds with wonder the pitcher-plant,—emblem of the fountain in an arid desert,—can you ask him consider it a common thing, as it is to you who have seen it and read of it a hundred times? Or will seeing that wonder of God on his one leisure day make him less pious, less inclined to muse on the works of God, the Creator, in such spare moments as he has?

"I repeat it, the educated and uneducated do not meet on even terms in the denials of recreation.

"That which is pleasure to you, to this is nought,—a strain of thought that perplexes. You cannot fill the weak vessel with that spiritual wine; it would burst and burst. God made religion simple: a thing for babes and sucklings; to comfort the dying cottager; to be a hope to the ignorant beggar. Man makes religion complex; and spins cobwebs of his own thoughts round the broad and manifest law of God. Those who take Scripture texts as warrant against innocent Sabbath recreation are like those who take Scripture texts to prove that they know the set term of duration of this mortal globe. As, in the very book from whence prophecies are cited to prove at what date our world shall be destroyed, we are expressly told that God keeps that secret even from the angels—so in the very book Sabbatharians quote, they are expressly told that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

"For those who would argue on the wretched narrow ground of mere task-work who say, "Oh! we can't have gardens opened where watchers and gatekeepers must be employed,"—there is an answer easy, that it is a wonder so much discipline can be maintained on such a sandy foundation.

"Parks, gardens, lodges,—houses w—

gatekeepers, gardeners, porters, and servants, — are in constant occupation all over Great Britain on the Sabbath day. If the poor man may not have his walk in the Botanical Garden because a gatekeeper must let him in, why should a fine lady's coachman drive her to church, or for an airing? Why should any servant in any house be troubled with any common duty? Why should not the whole machinery of life stand still till Monday morning? If the answer be, "These other things are necessary, the poor man or mechanic's walks in these gardens are not," — I say, "Neither are the things of which I made mention necessary: they are harmless, they are habitual; but they are *not* necessary. Some are positive luxuries: all bear an exact analogy to the recreation for which the occupying of a few gatekeepers is required."

"In the city of Edinburgh, where so fierce a denunciation against harmless Sabbath recreation is forever going on; group after group of filthy drunken creatures lie lounging in the public way, to the scandal and dread of the passers-by, — even on and about flights of steps leading to chapels where their most eloquent and earnest preachers rivet the attention of more decent hearers.

"Such groups are never seen on continental Sabbaths, — not even in Paris, that most dissolute of cities; and, in the country towns and villages of foreign lands, such scenes are positively unknown.

"These stricter Sabbath rules, and the vehement battle of sects as to how to keep God's day holy, do not make Scotland a moral country. Drunken in a greater measure than other countries, fierce in crime, she can scarcely point to the evidence of her training, as proof of the success of her theories; and, peradventure, it would be a blessed change there, if, in lieu of Sabbatarian discussion there was such Sabbath recreation as might lead the mind of man neither to sensual pleasure nor to burning disputation, but to those scenes which lift him

"From Nature up to Nature's God."

"Well, now, I think that is all very true," observed Neil, as he paused to take breath.

"Don't you think it is true darling mother?"

"Yes, I do, Neil. I think it true and just; and I heartily wish it would become the universal opinion."

"Ah! yes; but are there such pig-headed people in the world? people whose understandings really seem to be turned upside

down. Lady Clochnaben, mother, is an upside down woman. She is always wrong, and always thinks she is right. It is a pity we can't pack a few moderate sensible thoughts on the top of her mind, and then tickle her 'this side uppermost.' But she will never be converted."

Neil paused a moment, and then added, with a slight degree of hesitation, —

"I think a woman should be very kind and gentle. I don't know what would become of the poor at Clochnaben and Torrieburn, if it were not for Effie and Mrs. Ross Heaton. They can't give much money, you know; but Effie reads, and Mrs. Ross Heaton makes capital broth for them; and altogether they are very good to them. And, mother, do you know I overheard Mrs. Cregan speaking of *you* yesterday to Lorimer Boyd, when he called after arriving in London from Vienna. She said she thought you looked ill; but you were still busy, and she believed a special blessing from God would rest on your head, because of your unwearied goodness to the poor."

A slight flush tinged Gertrude's cheek and brow.

"My boy, Mrs. Cregan is a very generous, warm-hearted woman; and she says many kind things of me and others."

"But don't you believe it, mother? don't you believe in the special blessing? I do. They thought I was not attending; but I heard her. Those were her very words. I do think, when your dear name is mentioned, I sprout a couple of extra ears; I seem to have four instead of two. I can hear all down a long dinner-table if they speak of you. And I feel so proud of you, mother! I know you are so good, so far beyond all other women. I feel I could thank God every day for making me your son and my father's."

A moan escaped the pale lips he bent to kiss; and that wild appeal — "O my Neil!" which Lady Charlotte had complained was spoken "in a tone that made one's heart ache," and was "so unreasonable, and so unlike dear Gertie" — once more puzzled and pained the sensitive lad by her side.

He was silent for a minute or two. He asked for no explanation, but bent anew over his book. A smile played presently round his full young mouth. "O mother! here is such a quaint little bit! I must read it to you. Listen now. I don't know what it is about, except that it is still something respecting the poor. It is quoted from some very old pamphlet called the 'Petition of the Poor Starving Debtor,' printed in 1691, and advising that we should

subscribe to pay the debts of the poor. And it says, 'Such charity is an act of great piety towards Almighty God; who requireth it of us. For He hath left the poor as His pupils, or wards, and the rich as His stewards, or guardians, to provide for them. It is one of those great tributes that He justly requires from the rest of mankind, which, because they cannot pay to Him, He hath scattered the poor amongst them to be His substitutes and receivers.'

"And here's a little bit against pride; a curious little bit, saying, 'That, in Charles the First's time, noblemen and gentlemen thought it a very good provision for their younger sons, to bind them apprentice to rich merchants.'

"Well, I can't say I should like to be taking an inventory of bales of silk and sacks of coffee, instead of shooting and fishing at Glenrossie. I think, if I had lived in that mercantile day, I should have taken my cat, like Whittington, and gone to seek my fortune."

"It was the cat that went; Whittington stayed in London," said Gertrude, smiling; "so you would have had to be patient and industrious before you even came to be Lord Mayor; which seems to have been then considered what the present population of Paris deem it now, — the greatest dignity in the world."

"Well, I trust I should have attained it; and Effie and I would have come to visit you in long crimson and blue robes as represented in the story-books. Poor Effie! I hope a letter will come to-morrow. Cousin Kenneth was scarcely so well when she last wrote."

Gertrude sighed, and leaned back on her pillow. Thought, which is lightning quick, once more took her through those days in the Villa Mandorlo and the more fatal scenes at Glenrossie, and so floated her soul away to her lost Douglas, and his health, and the singing of that unknown, whose voice "was one of the sweetest he had ever heard."

Neil, too, sat musing. His boyish spirit was out far away over the hills, in the moonlight, bidding weary little Cousin Effie a sorrowful good-bye.

So there was deep silence in that luxurious room, where the clear boyish voice with its earnest intonation had been lately reading those extracts respecting the poor, — silence deep and unbroken.

All of a sudden, the door was hurriedly opened; and Lady Charlotte, with an open note in her hand, and an expression of

anxiety and perplexity on her weak little face, came in exclaiming, "Now I do hope and insist, Gertie, that you spare yourself, and don't go!"

"Don't go where, little mother?"

"It is a letter from that widow, the mother of Jamie Carmichael, who used to be at Torrieburn, you know, that poor Mr. Heaton was so good to" —

"Yes, dear mother. She has had to struggle for a livelihood lately. I have seen a good deal of her. She is doing better. Jamie's apprenticed; and she takes in lodgers in a humble way."

"That's just it, Gertie; that's just what so ungrateful. I mean, after you have helped her, and put her in a way of having lodgers, to send for you in this sort of way to see one of them! Why should you see a lodger? I want you to rest, and take care of yourself; and she sends urgent requests for you to see lodgers. Pray don't see a lodger. Let her send for the doctor. That's much better."

"Let me see her note, dear mother," said Gertrude, with a smile, half weary and half compassionate. "If any one is ill, I ought to go — it is in my district."

"District! Now, my own darling Gertie, are you a clergyman? Besides, a lodger does not belong to any district; and yet see she says he is *strangely ill*; well, is not that more the doctor's business than yours? If he's strangely ill, you may not know what to do, or what is the matter with him, a bit better than she does; and it may be something catching. And it's a man! I wouldn't mind so much if it were a woman; but really, after the Isle of Wight — though to be sure there are not so many smugglers in London, only I think — oh, Gertie, don't go!" exclaimed Lady Charlotte, getting quite entangled in the network of her own rapid sentences, and suddenly breaking off "Don't, pray don't!"

But Gertrude had risen from her seat and stood folding the note in her fingers, and looking very grave and resolute. She stooped, and kissed her mother's cheek tenderly, and said, "Do not be over-anxious for me, my mother. If it were God's will that I should suffer for doing His work, I should not escape by neglecting it. I solemnly promised (and I am only one of many who visit in the same way) that I would come, when called to the sick or dying. The person lodged with Betty Carmichael appears to be dying, and dying very miserably and uncomfortably; he has told her he has not a friend in

the world. I must go to him. When the doctor comes, I shall return. Do not fear for me more to-day than any other day."

"You look more weary to-day, worse than ever," said poor Lady Charlotte, with half a sob.

"I was a good deal agitated talking over matters with Lorimer Boyd, you know; I had not seen him for a very long time. But I have been lying down, and am quite rested and strong again. Neil has been reading to me."

"Ah! I am sure *he* doesn't think you ought to risk your health in the way you do!"

The boy looked eagerly up from his book, as if he had not caught the drift of the reference made to him. His mother smiled.

"Neil, on the contrary, has got a beautiful creed from Mrs. Cregan, that a special blessing rests on me during these visits."

Neil started to his feet, and threw his eager arms round her.

"I *do* believe it; I do believe God keeps special blessings for those who are like you. You always seem to me like one of the beautiful pale saints in pictures, and what you think right to do seems to me the only right. God bless your visit and you, dear mother. May I come?"

"No, my Neil; but I will not be long away."

Not long? It seemed to Lady Charlotte an interminable visit; and her prophecy of evil was apparently fulfilled to the letter, when a hurried pencilled note came from her daughter, saying that the person she had visited was said to have a bad sort of fever, and she thought best, for Neil's sake, not to return home at all till the medical man had made out what ailed him.

More, Gertrude did not tell that weak but loving mother. For what there was to tell besides would have driven her half-distracted with pain and terror.

When Lady Ross reached the obscure lodging where Betty Carmichael earned her scanty livelihood, she found the poor old Scotchwoman in a panic scarcely to be described. She led her — thanking her at every step — up the little creaking staircase into the small clean room. There — stretched on a bed, panting, with swollen features, his head so closely shaved as to be entirely bald, and a long auburn wig, dank and soaked with water, on the pillow by him — lay 'the lodger' whom she had been called to see. He had fallen in the river, Mrs. Carmichael said, and all his things were wet; and she had not known

he wore a wig till it slipped off; and she had left it there, not daring to touch anything: afraid of the man.

"Do you feel very ill? Do you wish any one sent for who would know you? Have you no friends with whom I can communicate? Medical assistance will be here directly."

So spoke the sweet grave voice; and the sweet serious eyes waited to see the wretched being turn and answer, if indeed he was sensible.

In a moment he turned with a struggle, grasping the bed-clothes with his hand; sat upright in bed, and looked wildly in Gertrude's face.

His aspect was inconceivably horrible. A sort of purple pallor overspread his skin; his bald head gave yet darker expression to his great lustrous eyes; his mouth was swollen and half open; he had the expression of one who strives with a frightful dream. She had seen him before; but where?

Gertrude gazed, wondering: she endeavoured to command herself; but nature was too strong: she suddenly gave a wild shriek, and covered her face with her hands.

"Don't leave me! don't abandon me! have pity!" gasped the man, clutching now at her dress. "Something ails me more than common — some horrible stroke of death. Don't leave me, and I'll make you bless the hour — don't!"

Gertrude slowly uncovered her face.

"Fear nothing from me," she said: "I will neither leave you nor betray you. I know you. You are JAMES FRERE!"

A groan was the only answer; but there was a look of wild appeal in his eyes, such as the hunted stag at bay gives when the dogs have fastened their fangs in his side.

"I won't leave you till the doctor comes," repeated Gertrude; "and I will return early to-morrow."

"I may not be here to-morrow; stay by me now. I have something to tell you before death chokes my life out."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

HUNTED DOWN AT LAST!

THAT eventful Sunday evening happened to be one (among many such) which the Dowager Clochnaben devoted to contradicting her son Lorimer. She had not had a favourable opportunity of contradicting him for a considerable period. He had been away at Vienna; and it is difficult to

carry on arguments by letter if your correspondent obstinately omits all answer to the topics in dispute.

A Clochnaben "dictum" that "Heaven would probably visit the capital of Austria with fiery vials of wrath" on account of Strauss's waltzes being performed by military bands in the gardens there "on the Lord's Day," had always been passed over by him in his replies *sub silentio*, to her very great indignation; and she now recovered her opportunity for its discussion.

The occasion seemed certainly hard upon Lorimer, as the match which lit the gunpowder of her stored-away and slumbering wrath was a *calenu* offered by himself; an almanac enamelled and encrusted with turquoise and garnets, in that style of Viennese workmanship in which the sinful admirers of Strauss and of military music so greatly excel.

"Humph!" said the Dowager, as she grimly planted the almanac on the chimney-piece, "I see they mark the Sunday (in their absurd foreign lingo) in the list of days, just as if they kept it."

"Well, they do keep it, in their own way."

"Yes, so you told me, and a pretty way too; banging drums, and playing on fifes and trombones and ophicleides in the ears of all passers-by, and encouraging folk that ought to be hearing something very different to dawdle up and down listening to their heathen clatter."

"My dear mother, I'm sure I wish, if it could be more agreeable to you, that they played on shawms and trumpets and timbrels — whatever timbrels may be."

"That's right, Lorimer, make a simple jest of it! Little you care for the desecration of the Lord's Day. I believe you actually prefer your wicked continental Sabbaths to the decent Sabbaths of Scotland, which you were taught to reverence as long as I nurtured you in the way of the Lord."

"Well, I confess I feel very much weaned from that nurture, my dear mother. And, having seen Sabbaths now in Lisbon, Paris, Vienna, Florence, Naples, Marseilles, Milan, and a number of other towns, I must say, for their wicked inhabitants, that in no single instance, either among a rough mercantile or a luxurious and idle aristocracy, have I ever witnessed anything approaching, in the remotest degree, to the indecent desecration undergone by that memorial day in your paradise of Sabbatarians, my native Scotland."

"Those that won't look certainly can't be expected to see," retorted the Dowager,

with a sniff of indignation; "and it's my belief you'd say you saw nothing wrong if a fair or a cattle-show were held on the Sabbath day, and a ball given in the evening."

"You are mistaken, my dear mother. But I am not about to enter into 'the vexed Bermoothes' of that whirlpool of argument as to how much, or how little, relaxation and recreation are permissible on Sundays. The Dervishes of the East believe they best pay respect to their Deity by the monotonous exercise of twirling round on one toe, or hanging on by their elbows to a suspended staff, like flying foxes and sleeping bats, or by the yet more passive service of letting their nails grow to a portentous length; and the Dervishes of the North may have their own notions of the extent of monotonous agreeable to the Great Creator of infinite variety; to the God who sends millions of millions of men hourly into the world, and no two men so alike in understanding, aspect, voice, or bearing, but that their fellow-creatures shall know them apart, and acknowledge a distinction and difference between them. I merely persist that the 'continental Sabbath,' as you call it, is much more decently and inoffensively kept than the Scottish Sabbath."

"The Scottish Sabbath is much obliged to you, I'm sure!"

"Well, you know, my dear mother, you yourself complain of the drunkenness, the vice, the pleasure-orgies, that go on even in your own neighbourhood there. Now I recommend you to make a little continental tour; and in the leisurely hours you may spend in a Viennese or Italian promenade, consider these alternative propositions. Either the Scotch are so innately and incurably corrupt, that no amount of teaching and preaching can bring them to spend their time decently on that particular day, or there is something radically wrong in the coercive rules you would lay down for their spending it. I am of the latter opinion."

"Of course you are. We should spend our time in listening to drums and fiddle and chattering balderdash, instead of going to church, I suppose?"

"No; but, in my opinion, it is the lack of any innocent and wholesome occupation or recreation that gives over the clay tabernacle which holds a soul to the devil. He findeth it swept and garnished, and step nimbly in, with the minor devils of sensuality and drunkenness at his heels. The continental Sabbath is a day of prayer at intervals, from the early sunrise of matins to the taper-lit evening mass. But it is also a day

of recreation; a day of enjoyment in the open air; a day when men and women are not expected to shut eyes and ears to all but a nasal monotone of appeal or thanksgiving for blessings apparently granted entirely in vain. And now let us have no more of this, for I must go out, and leave you and the Austrian almanac to settle the matter between you. I promised to call on Lady Charlotte Skifton."

"And that Sabbath saint, Lady Ross, I presume?"

"And on Lady Ross," answered Lorimer, in his sternest tone.

"Well, then, you'll find neither," retorted the Dowager, with a certain degree of triumph; "for I've just had a note from Lady Charlotte, and she'll be here directly,—ready to whimper, I suppose, as usual—with the boy Neil, who says you promised him a dog on your return. As to his mother, she has wisely gone to see some beggar in a fever, and daren't come back till she's consulted a doctor about infection. I suppose you think *that* a fit employment for the Sabbath day?"

"Yes, I do; a very fit employment. 'Whether is it better to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath day?' I lay no claim to originality in that last sentence;" and a "grim smile" curled round Lorimer Boyd's mouth.

"Oh! of course *you* approve. When people lose their characters, it's a fine flourish to set up going about doing good."

Lorimer's small stock of patience vanished in exasperation.

"If," said he bitterly, "she had joined that peculiar regiment of effete pleasure-seekers who deem themselves enrolled as God's own dandies, with the Rhodopes, Messalinas, and Lesbias who are the *vivandières* of their religious camp, and who, as soon as enlisted, think themselves better able to teach and preach than all the regular clergy of Great Britain,—you might say so, mother. But, so far as I have known, Gertrude Ross has done good without seeking the reward of human approval; without setting herself up as judge or instructress; or copying those wonderful Christian professors who are so struck and amazed at their own late conversion, that they must needs pass it round like the bottle after dinner, ignorant, or incredulous, of the patent fact, that, long before they ever read a line of Scripture, the persons they appeal to were already walking with God to the best of their ability."

"You needn't be so violent," sneered his

mother. "We all know you can't endure a word that doesn't worship Lady Ross."

"I can't endure hypocrisy, wherever I find it, either in man or woman. I hate to see persons who are unfit to teach, teaching. I hate to see men who have led base lives *kotooed* to, and listened to, perhaps publicly thanked, when they ought to be degraded and forgotten; I hate to watch the vain struggle of the innocent to be justified, or the successful effort of the deceiver to be set on high. I consider such reversal of God's clear justice to be the true translation of 'taking His name in vain.' I hate"—But what more Lorimer meant to denounce—while his mother angrily watched his fierce, intellectual countenance, ready with a keenly-sharpened answer, as soon as his voice should pause—cannot be known; for at this juncture in came Lady Charlotte, "ready to whimper," as prophesied by her scornful relative, and Neil, who threw back his eager head in Lorimer's warm embrace, and said laughingly,—

"I'm come with Mamma Charlotte, out of avarice and self-interest. Where's my dog?"

"Here," said Lorimer, with a smile so sweet and kindly, that it scarcely seemed the face of the same man who had just been speaking. "Here! and a smart little fellow he is, with your name as owner already engraved on his collar. You must train him to English, for he is only used to German; and don't begin by delivering him over to some groom to clip his ears and tail, as if, among other improvements of the works of creation, God didn't know how to make a terrier. And now where is your dear mother?"

Neil lifted his rosy mouth from the passionate kiss of welcome he was imprinting on the terrier's forehead, and said, "She's gone to see a poor man who is ill."

"But where is the poor man?"

"At—here's the address;" and Neil dived into his pocket, and pulled out with sundry other small articles a somewhat battered little memorandum-book, which he presented to Lorimer with one hand, still caressing the dog with the other.

Lorimer took his hat.

"Where are you going now?" said Lady Clochnaben. "Lady Ross is not returned."

"I'm going to break the Lord's Day by looking after that beggar," said her son as he closed the door and disappeared.

A thrill of something as like alarm and concern as her nature permitted ran through the iron bosom of the grim Dowager. She

had been listening to Lady Charlotte's querulous terrors during the presentation of the dog to his young master, and felt the truth of her "whimpering" cousin's observation, that *It must* be something very particularly dreadful, or Gertie would not stay the night away from home."

"Run after him," she said to Neil, — "but, no; it is of no use asking him to stay for my behest. Fair faces are the devil's best tools. And your daughter's one of them," added she, turning suddenly and with exceeding fierceness to poor Lady Charlotte; whose whimpering thereupon broke into sobs.

While they argued, Lorimer stalked forth, and, taking the first cab he could meet with, drove rapidly to the obscure lodgings of the old Scotchwoman.

Many and many a year afterwards he still saw vividly, as he saw it then, the scene which presented itself to his eyes.

There was more light in the small room than ever had lit the humble apartment before, each of the hurried visitants having merely set down the candle furnished to them. The doctor was there, and Gertrude, and that Creole wife, unknown by sight to Lorimer, the terrified old Scotchwoman, and the "neighbour" who had done the office of a servant in attending to the house-door, and who, now following Lorimer with another light, had left that and the room-door alike open. That he had come during the last gasp of a horrible death-scene was Lorimer's instant impression. Gertrude was kneeling by the blind-looking, purple-bloated object, stretched panting on the bed. The Creole was standing near her, weeping, her face hid in her hands. The doctor and those others present, all gazing with fixed and yet shrinking scrutiny on the dying man; the light falling full upon him and them, though flickering, torch-like, in the draught of air from the staircase.

As Lorimer moved with an exclamation of painful anxiety towards Gertrude, another group appeared at the gaping doorway.

AILIE was there with two policemen!

Her little hands were lifted and clinched in front of her slender person, like two little claws ready to pounce. There was no more escape for James Frere. The thirst of vengeance could now be quenched by a long satisfying draught. He was hunted down at last!

She stood for a moment as if scarcely understanding the reality of what was passing; those little feline hands still suspended in their odd attitude of seizure, with her eyes glitteringly fixed on the Creole.

"Take him!" at last she said, in a sharp short whisper. "Take him!" and she turned her head to the men behind her.

Lorimer Boyd, roused by the words and the movement, looked up, looked towards her, while the group round the bed remained absorbed in the agony before them.

"Wretched woman," said he, "the man is dead whom you have trapped and taken."

DEAD!

James Frere had escaped her after all.

As Ailie turned and fled, with a hoarse cry, from the death-chamber, Gertrude rose slowly to her feet, and looked round as in a trance. A wild, unnatural, ecstatic smile was on her face. It changed a little; a certain degree of consciousness was in it as she espied Lorimer.

She moved towards him with an effort like one who walks in sleep.

"Look!" she said, in an odd whisper, as strange as her countenance, "look!" and she held up a roll of battered and crushed papers, gravel-stained and torn.

The picture of Gertrude standing thus in the wavering light that beat to and fro as if it had something of the triumph of life in it, never left Lorimer's memory, nor the strange effect of the same flickering and moving radiance passing over the deathly stillness of the bed, over the dark-shadowed eyes of the dead man — his bald discoloured shaven skull, and his thin knuckles clinched outside the sheets, with their deep-indent scar more visible than ever on that white background.

He seized Gertrude's hands with a trembling grasp. "Come away; oh! come away from this place," he said.

"You should all go — go immediately!" said the doctor, as he gently and pityingly touched the sobbing Creole's shoulder. "This man has died of the worst species of typhus; the 'black fever' of the books. Leave the window wide open, and go, all of you, go! It is the strangest case I ever assisted at."

In a minute or two more, all was hushed and darkened there; and the corpse of James Frere was left alone.

Lorimer led Gertrude forth. She neither wept, nor fainted, nor trembled; but once when in his agony of anxiety he pressed her hands tightly in his own, she murmured: "Oh! I hope I shall not wake and find all a dream!"

Then, by degrees, the state of stupefaction seemed to melt away; she looked round; the room in the hotel where he was staying into which he had brought her — thanked him — said "it was right not to take her to

Neil,"—and in the effort to conclude the sentence, "It would be such bad news for Douglas if our boy were ill,"—the dark clouds of oppressive thought clashed together, and a shower of tears at once relieved and exhausted her.

Lorimer never spoke. He sat silently by, his arms folded tight across his broad chest, as if in resolute effort to avoid any ill-judged impulse to console or check that convulsive fit of weeping.

She was the first to speak. She stretched her hand across, and laid it gently on his arm.

"I have got THAT LETTER!" she said, with white trembling lips. "I have recovered the letters they stole from me, to persuade Douglas I was false. Then she told him all, as she herself had learnt it from the wretched being whose strange and erring life had just ended. He had admitted every particular that Lorimer had already heard respecting his career to be true. He claimed to be Clochnaben's son when a young man carrying on a most dissipated career at college. Not that he had ever seen him as a child, or knew it till his mother's death, who had then assured him of it and put into his hands Clochnaben's letters in those early days, full of protestations of everlasting attachment, and proving that her sole means of subsistence was an income received from her seducer. Unaware of the sort of man with whom he had to deal, and not yet experienced in the world, he had rashly brought these letters and proofs to Clochnaben himself, with an appeal for support and fatherly protection. Clochnaben gave him fair words and specious promises, affected to be much touched at reperusing his own old love-letters,—got them into his possession by giving Frere a sum of money in exchange; and from the hour he had so deprived him of all means of corroborating the scandal—as he termed it—of his connexion with Frere's mother, utterly denied that any such intimacy had ever existed; and declared it was the invention of the young adventurer, whose career he nevertheless at first attempted to arrange, by getting him foreign mercantile employment, and so getting rid of him.

It was years since he had received assistance from Richard Clochnaben, when he presented himself with the false and specious tale Gertrude might remember, at Clochnaben Castle. He had then escaped from gaol instead of a Roman Catholic seminary. Nothing was true except his privations, which had been very real. He brought with him two or three letters supposed to

have been found among his mother's things after the major portion of the correspondence had been bought by Clochnaben. The latter instantly taxed him with the forgery; pointed out that he had not been at that time in England, or at any place from which they were dated, and declared that on the smallest further attempt to establish such relations between him and Frere, he would himself deliver him up to justice, "and see him swing with satisfaction." That notwithstanding this declaration, and the rage he had shown at the odd accident of invitations to supersede Heaton, which had made Frere an inmate under the same roof, he had supplied him with a sum of money to facilitate his escape at the time the detective had come to Glenrossie, taking a dreadful oath never to repeat such assistance if he dared to return to Great Britain.

He had never since received one farthing of help, and had continued to "live by his wits," having drained every sixpence he could from the infatuated Alice Ross.

"Hunted down at last," by that unexpected avenger, he had sought in vain an obscure asylum in disguise of a travelling artist. Afraid of the police, who came suddenly upon him in a tavern while consulting with one of his former felon companions, whom they were seeking, he had made one of his narrowest escapes by threading unusual streets and bye-lanes, and coming out at last on a narrow canal that ran by the Regent's Park. There he hastily hailed a barge that was slowly making its way past him, and giving a couple of shillings to the man in charge, asked for a passage, saying that he had been walking all the morning, and was footsore and fatigued. He lay down under shelter of some tarpaulin, and felt nearly suffocated by the strange and disagreeable odour of the cargo in the barge. He sat up and looked into the water, which appeared to him dazzling with beautiful colours; he became perfectly giddy and insensible, and on attempting to stand up, lost his balance, and fell over the unprotected ledge of the barge into the canal. He was assisted out, put into a cab, and was quite sensible enough after the immersion, to give his address, and not sorry to have an excuse in his landlady's eyes for remaining in bed and in hiding. The dreadful smell, however, haunted him, and he was unable to eat anything either that day or the next. His eyes then became affected; small bladders of blood seemed to fill and weigh down the lids, and, within a very brief period from the sending for Lady Ross, whom he recognised,

he became blind, and the eyes presented a most dreadful appearance — bloodshot, blank, and staring. He told Gertrude he was certain he was dying from the inhalation of poisonous vapours on the barge; that his blindness was a judgment on him; confessed all, and referred her for a portfolio of papers to the Creole, whose address he gave. She had listened at first incredulously to Gertrude's story, and seemed to think it some new attempt to entrap him, but at length proposed to accompany Lady Ross, carrying the portfolio with her. From the mass of papers, drawings, plans which he had feared to take when he fled from the vicinity of Manchester Square, he gave a packet, in which was the letter to Kenneth in the condition in which it had been formerly found. He said that more than once lately he had considered whether he would not propose to sell it to Lorimer Boyd, or to Lady Ross herself, but was deterred by the fear of being given into custody; and that he was still casting about who he could employ to transact that business, when he was stricken by his strange malady. By the time his broken confession was over, and the doctor's examination made, he was insensible and dying, his body covered with suffused spots, his eyes a blank, jelly-like mass.

The doctor had been of opinion that he died, as he had said, from inhaling poison, and that the poison was refuse matter from some gasworks on the banks of the canal.

He did not anticipate any fatal effects to those who had assisted the man in his horrible illness, as it arose from such peculiar causes; but they should be careful for some days.

And so ended Gertrude's agitated narration, and at the close, she lifted her weary, hopeful, lovely eyes to Lorimer, questioning both by words and looks how to get all this disclosed to Sir Douglas.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

INVALIDED HOME.

THEN Lorimer had to make an avowal on his part, of being in possession of news painfully interesting to Gertrude. Sir Douglas was ill: very ill: any very sudden agitation might be fatal to him: he was in fact invalided home; and Lorimer had already resolved to go out to him, and had written to try and secure the services of Giuseppe, as an excellent sick nurse and attendant, and who on his return might be of use to Kenneth,

of whose bodily condition late accounts had been unfavourable. Gertrude must put her patient trust in God as hitherto, and believe, as Lorimer believed, that she would receive her reward, even in this world, for all the faithful uncomplaining tenderness with which she had borne her hard lot as respected her husband.

So Lorimer departed; and, after her few days' anxious quarantine, Gertrude dwelt once more with her mother and her beloved Neil, and waited news from the Crimea.

Is it forgotten? Is it faded to a sad dream, except with those who actually took part in it, that war waged with disaster as much as with the armed foe? that war, in which, to the eternal glory of English courage, the heroism and endurance were proved equal to the heroism of action; and boys and men and aged warriors alike showed their willingness not only to die fighting for their country, but to die miserably, tediously, obscurely, for their country, — without even murmur or appeal? when beardless boys taken from luxurious homes, served in the trenches and camped in wreaths of snow, and bore the awful change with eager gallantry; till mothers made childless knew when the tidings reached them, that those they had so fondly cradled and so tenderly reared had perished, *killed*, but not *conquered*, by the hardships of that war?

Are the names *but* names now of strange far-away places known to us only by maps and sketches, where the best blood of England reddened the streams, or sank in the alien earth? Are they vanished, like the thirst that was quenched in the Bulgarian River, after that burning and weary march prelude to the war of the morrow, — when men stood gazing on the rugged and precipitous heights that crowned its banks, and on the roots of willows mowed down in a bitter harvest to prevent shelter or concealment of a foe; while three hundred yards of fire blazed in the distance from the quiet village of Boulhohi?

Is Alma but a vague melodious sound? where, fording that unknown river, and marching straight into batteries held to be impregnable, we drove out the five-and-forty thousand men before the sun marked the hours of time for the struggle? Do we shudder still at the tale of ever-memorable Balaklava, when circled by a blaze of artillery, front, flank, and rear, the gallant horsemen rode to death at the word of a mistaken command, and left two-thirds of the number on the ground? The dull November mists of morning, in our safe English homes, never bring to musing fancy the fig-

of that miserable anxious dawn at Inkermann, when those who had worked in the trenches all night were suddenly called forth from their comfortless rest in tents and on the bare ground, to charge against that overwhelming and barbaric foe, who mutilated the dead to avenge the bravery of the living?

Are our dreaming ears never haunted on safe home-pillows, by floating watchwords through the night, of the brief sad sentences spoken by dying lips, whose farewells were given so far away? "Forward, 23d!" shouted one young voice. "Stand firm, for the honour of England and the credit of the Rifles. Firm, my men!" cried another. "Come on, 63d!" says their leader. "I will fight to the last!" is panted from the breast of the overpowered swordsman called upon to surrender. "I do not move till the battle is won!" exclaims the crippled hero who lay bleeding before Sebastopol amongst guns still directed by him against the enemy.

Do we think as our daily post comes happily in, or as we ourselves carelessly sit down at our writing-tables for an uneventful correspondence, of that charnel-house at Varna, and all the "last messages" written by deputy for poor soldiers at Scutari, and on board the swarming troop-ships, and in the miserable hospitals denuded of stores or fit appliance for the wounded? Do the stray scattered sentences return recorded among a thousand others, when one writes, "Praying my mother will not feel the misfortune of my death too much;" and another, "Write to my father, he will break this to my wife;" and some still wrote the triumphant date, "Written on the field we have taken from the enemy!"

And are we mourning yet for other deaths?—the deaths of those who came back to native land, and pleasant homes, whose faces were once more dwelt on by loving, tender eyes, whose hands were once more clasped by loving hands, but who were so worn and shaken by the past tempest of that wintry war, that, like nipped trees, they stood for a little while, and then succumbed and fell?—those who have not survived to wear the laurel in future wars, but who rest under the "cypress and yew!"—sorrowful trees of their own green land—soldiers who died in our time of peace, when "the bitterness of death" seemed ended, and have left a blank in many a home that never shall be filled?

Do we ever see, as we cross, on a sunny day, from the gardens opposite Queen Victoria's palace and the Horse Guards, a vision

of the crowded Park on that thrilling day when such of her wounded heroes as had returned, passing before her in their lines,—receiving a medal and a word—for the life that was risked, and the health or the limb for ever lost, and loyally saluting, amid the cheers of the crowd, the Ruler of the country in whose service they had bled?

Events follow events in this busy world of ours as wave follows wave on the wide and restless sea,—too happy if they do not pass like those waves, leaving only, here and there, a narrow heap of weed thrown up on the shore, where the landmarks of history stand.

How much is remembered, and how much forgotten; how many are rewarded, and how many suffered to float away into oblivion and neglect,—is best known to those who should receive, and those who could bestow, the prizes that glitter in the eyes of the lovers of glory; and the approval which should be the recompense of those who would fight and suffer, if only for duty and conscience' sake.

Sir Douglas was not among those who could claim reward for action. He had served his country well in many a past campaign; but the dreary days had come to him, as to many another gallant heart, when he was compelled to own that the body could no longer obey the soul's behest any more than the soldier, bleeding, fainting to death on the battle-field, can rise to the sound of the bugle-call, and march with his comrades to victory.

In bed, or in a blanket on the ground in his tent, on board a crowded steamer borne to an hotel at Pera, looking forward at one time only to a grave at Scutari, rallying a little, and struggling so far with sickness as again to engage with the enemy, only again to be disabled, not by wounds, but by sickness, depressed, worn out, exhausted, and miserable at the helplessness consequent on this condition, he had at last to surrender to the force of circumstances, and confess himself a dying invalid.

His letter to Lorimer was the letter of a broken-hearted man; and he proved his consciousness of that fact by the closing words of his letter: "I am not the only officer of command here who am dying, not of the privations of the camp, or the wounds received in battle, but of a broken heart."

And Lorimer knew that only the extreme of fading and failing weakness would have wrung that sentence from his friend and comrade, dear to him from boyhood till the present hour.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

PEACE IN GLENROSSIE.

THE summer days wore on. Sir Douglas had embarked, and was on his way home. So much at least was known to Gertrude's restless heart. That strange and dreadful life, so busy round him, of alternate wet and cold and heat, of toil to procure water or proper food, of roads impassable, and insufficient clothing, of wounds and cholera and exhaustion, of trenches and pickets, of overloaded troop-ships, and miserable moving of dying men on mules and rough contrivances of planks, decimated companies, and needless sacrifice by neglect and mismanagement of lives that might have been spared, — all that was over. But the mortification of inaction, and the private sorrow of heart, these things remained ever present with him; and at first his state of debility was such, that the faithful friend who had joined and now accompanied him, daily expected the bitter task of writing home to say that "all was ended," and that the gallant spirit had passed away from all earthly struggles to the long peace of death.

A better fate was in store for him. As they neared England, his health improved; and when at length Lorimer Boyd announced their landing at Folkestone, he was also able to add that he hoped, before leaving that port, to break to him all that had occurred since the day that Gertrude had been called to Frere's strange and dreadful sick-bed, and in obeying that call had indeed gained the "special blessing" which her young son believed would descend on her head.

Once again he wrote from the hotel at Folkestone. Sir Douglas had such an access of despondency on finding himself once more in that saddened England which he had quitted under such grievous circumstances, that he had been confined to his room with low fever. Lorimer owned that at last he risked the shock of a more abrupt communication than he had originally intended, "lest our Douglas should die, and never know the truth on this side the grave."

All had now been told him; the papers given by Gertrude were in his possession, and had been read and re-read with many a bitter groan of vehement self-reproach. He sought no excuse in the chain of circumstances that had led him to deem her false whose truth had been so clearly proved, though he spoke sorrowfully of the constant concealment of facts which,

clearly explained and understood, would have seemed harmless and innocent as they were in reality. He spoke also of the suffering he had endured at times from flashes of torturing doubt, repelled with the strength of his heart, but recurring in wretched intervals, as on the day when he heard Kenneth so passionately speaking with Gertrude in the morning room. He found her agitated beyond what a common sympathy in his supposed domestic troubles could reasonably justify. And lastly he revealed to Lorimer — with injustice never while he lived to breathe that secret to mortal ear — the events of that fatal morning when Kenneth, delirious from drunken excess, had attempted his neck-life, accompanying that murderous assault with the wild speech, — "Part from me yourself; part from her forever!" As he said, "be sure if I do not marry your widow, no other man shall!"

The narrow escape from death with the unsteadiness of the drunkard's aim, then permitted; the pain and misery of mind Sir Douglas had undergone, still with his bandaged hand throbbing with pain, listening to the treacherous tale of Alice Ross, and reading, as he thought, as any one would have thought — the certain, incontrovertible proofs that Gertrude was on the eve of a sinful yielding to a passion so wildly and daringly expressed for her, not only to herself, but to her husband; the pining for her, the haunting of all memories of her, in spite of her convictions; the yearning for death on the battle-field; and the slow, ignoble, slow wasting-away of life that came instead of the agony of perplexity caused by Nell's innocent boyish letters about his mother and Kenneth, and his young cousin Effie's longing he had to countermand his own strict and solemn injunctions to Lorimer, and entreat for news of Gertrude, of both of the treasures he had lost and allured away, — all this did Sir Douglas acknowledge with an outpouring of the heart that left no thought unknown to the faithful friend who now soothed, and nursed, and consoled him with assurances of the past love and lingering hope that had upheld his innocent wife through all the bitter misunderstanding that had parted them.

"I knew this happier day would come," Lorimer wrote to her. "I was a true prophet of good; and I think in the depths of your heart you also looked for it sooner or later. Now let me beseech you to be as calm and well as possible, and expect Douglas back at Glenrossie with

what haste I can permit him to make, being, as I am at present a combination of sick-nurse and commander-in-chief.

"You must expect to see him altered, dear Gertrude; he is *very much* altered: very much more deserving of that title of 'Old Sir Douglas,' which it once so surprised you he should have obtained. But happiness is a great restorer, and I trust you have both many, many years of such happiness in store. — Yours ever, LORIMER."

The very sentence thus worded to reassure Gertrude filled her with that trembling anxiety which comes to those who love, like an extra sense.

If he should yet be taken from her! If he should die before he could reach Glenrossie! If she herself should fail, and faint, and perish before she could once more be folded in his embrace! — before she could speak words of love and welcome and pity, and see him stand on his own threshold-stone, by the side of her Neil, as on that fatal morning when she looked back at them from the carriage window as she left for Edinburgh, not knowing that look was to be her last! If, after all, they never should meet again on earth, after all her hopes and her triumphant justification!

Feverish was the life that Gertrude led during these days of helpless expectation. All the care of her which poor Lady Charlotte attempted to take seemed utterly in vain. Eating, sleeping, sitting still for more than a few minutes at a time, were all alike impossible. Yet she obeyed Lorimer's counsel. He had adjured her not to attempt to join them, even should Sir Douglas be delayed on the road by any relaxing or variation in health, — at all events not to come unless sent for. In the tranquillity of his own home, let the broken soldier recover the agitation which must naturally follow such a meeting as they looked forward to.

She obeyed. She was patient. The day at length dawned, which should give its sunset light to their re-union. She read again and again the sweet brief line in her husband's own handwriting, "My Gertrude. I am coming home to be forgiven."

"*Forgiven!* O love! O husband! O Douglas!" Scarcely could she refrain from such audible exclamations as broke the miserable meditations of her sleepless nights, when in her former grief she thought of him afar off, soothed by the songs of some stranger's voice.

The day wore on; the sound of wheels rapidly approaching was heard in the

avenue. Louder and nearer it came; louder and nearer still; till it suddenly ceased, and the master of Glenrossie Castle stood once more at the portal of his forsaken home.

"My wife!" was all Sir Douglas said. Lorimer Boyd had stepped aside as they left the carriage, and caught young Neil to his breast. The aged butler stood trembling and tearful as his master leaned a moment for support on his arm, and passed feebly in; while Gertrude, with a mixture of tenderness, suffering, and triumph in her face, such as beams from the countenance of the wife in Millais's unequalled picture of the "Release," folded her arms round the stately form whose head bowed low as if unworthy her embrace, and sobbed aloud for very excess of joy.

Nothing could part them more, — nothing but death: the long weary grief was over: the lesson of patience ended. There was peace at last in Glenrossie!

What would my readers have more? The rest of my tale is briefly told, or may be briefly guessed. The sorrowful approach of Kenneth the day after his uncle's arrival; humbling himself to the dust before the kindly pitying generous eyes that filled with tears as he bade him welcome. The triumph of Lady Charlotte, and the frolic of her curl, as she boasted of the justice done at last to her Gertie by the impetuous Sir Douglas, "who, however superior he might be thought by strangers, had owned himself entirely in the wrong." The iron spite of the Dowager Clochnaben, who resolutely crushed the tender little woman's joy; assuring her that the WORLD merely saw the yielding of a "silly auld carle" in Sir Douglas's misplaced indulgence, "after all that had happened, you know;" and that as to Kenneth, "folk might call it penitence if they pleased; but she called it softening of the brain." The wondering gladness of Maggie, when the light broke in upon her that her slender Effie would one day hold her place at "the Castle" as the bride of young Neil, and so melt Torrieburn and Glenrossie into one glad home. And last, not least, the rest of heart that came to Lorimer, lonely though many of his days might be; looking back to the long, long friendship which had ever found him leal and true; from the boyish days at Eton, till the passions and anxieties of early years were looked back to like a dream, and he sat by the winter fire and discussed the hopes and fears of a new generation at Glenrossie, with "Old Sir Douglas."

Allie had disappeared. There was indeed a rumor sent abroad in the narrow circles of Torrieburn and Glenrossie, that far North, in one of the bye-streets of the ancient city of Aberdeen, a spare and slender female lived, who answered her description; and whose occupation it was to prepare and execute cushions, and nets, and mats in soft coloured chenilles. Soft chenille that lightly covered the sharp wires beneath; so that when worn, and old, and broken, the faded trifle, ragged, and crooked, and witch-like, tore the inexperienced hand that lifted and fain would bend it back into shape. These, in their first soft freshness, she brought to the various hotels where visitors and sportsmen "put up," on their tour far North: and they were sold as the work of 'a decent bodie who had seen better days.' Furtively, in the dim foggy autumn evenings, that lady made her rounds; scudding swiftly, — creeping softly, — gazing warily, — avoiding all greeting or recognition, gliding round the dark corners from the better streets to her forlorn garret in a grim and gray stone house, five stories high, with little solid windows black with age. She had told the sharp slatternly landlady, she "could not pay a heavy rent," and she "liked a high room:" she had been "used *all her life* to a very lofty room, though small."

The high stone staircase, greasy with filth, seemed indeed no fatigue to that spare figure. Swiftly she passed upward; — so swiftly, that the long ends of the shabby light boa she wore round her throat waved in the air as if it had life: and only sometimes, if she heard voices, or saw some unusual glimmering light on the flats beneath her own as she ascended, she would pause, and peer with half-closed gleaming eyes, and swiftly vanish out of sight if she heard a door open or a footfall on the echoing stair.

Never was her own door open: never but by one rare chance, when she had gone out more hurriedly than usual with her chenille-work, because a Royal Princess was passing through the city of Aberdeen.

On that one rare occasion, a little meagre girl, tempted by curiosity, and the vista through the grim portal of those glossy, soft, bright-coloured materials, with their shining wire foundations glancing in the light, — stole in and stood by the table, absorbed in a mystery of admiration and contemplation. She never intruded again. That spare grim lady softly returned; gripped her sud-

denly by her bony little shoulder: shook and "worreted" her as a cat might shake a mouse. She dared not bat her eye. The "neighbour" whose child she might have hauled the cat-like lady to a police-office. She "only shook her." So she learned how to make those wire baskets sheathe their claw-like feet in velvet. But that shaking checked all curiosity: a long time to come, in the little boy's time, — causing her to sit stunned and fixed on the topmost step of the stone staircase, though in close vicinity to the door; unable to recover from her dizziness sufficiently to take refuge in the room below where she dwelt, in happy association with her bony little sisters and brother.

Ah! how different was the lone garret that stony house from the bright marble room at Glenrossie!

There once more, in the glowing light of reconciled love, and the glorious summer sunshine, sat Sir Douglas and his happy wife, talking of the past and future: voices full of gladness and eyes serene with peace.

Only now and then, with a sigh of regret, Sir Douglas would lament the years and more of life wasted in desert. And Gertrude, with her low voice full of the music of tenderness, would answer in self-reproachful speech with its counterpoint: "I ought to have told you all at first: I ought to have told you!" and echo her own sigh.

Once only she saw her vile and treacherous sister-in-law again. Once Sir Douglas and she were on their way to some pleasant visit near Inverness, and, during their stay in Aberdeen, they had taken a stroll into the outskirts of the town, near the sea.

There, in the gray evening, a spare figure stood, that waved its hands as now as in some aching despair, and disappeared in the distance.

"What is it, Gertrude?" said Sir Douglas, as he drew her arm closer within his own.

"I thought I saw Allie!" she answered quickly, and clung to that dear protective arm. "I thought I saw Allie looking over the sea!"

Was it Allie, indeed? and was she thinking of the awful day when the spare woman was murdered, or the day she hunted for down at last, or the love-day on the hill Glenrossie?

THE END.

NOTICES OF LITTELL'S LIVING AGE.

New-York Times.

If ever literary man had a mission, it is Mr. E. LITTELL. His life has been dedicated to the one purpose of providing the public with a periodical containing the cream of the numerous reviews, magazines, literary journals, and newspapers of Europe, approved now and then by the introduction of able and interesting articles from native publications. His first work, *The Museum*, has been so long out of print that a complete set rarely turns up for sale. The continuation, with many improvements, is this *Living Age*. This collection, commenced in 1844, is accessible, as every page has been stereotyped. Whoever possesses it is master of a variety of reading, which, in quality and quantity, has never been equalled. Here are the best articles on biography, history, literature, travels, science, politics, art, criticism, in a word, "*de omnibus rebus*," including fiction and poetry, which have appeared, during the last eleven years, in the best periodicals at home and abroad. Week after week, as with the regularity of well-adjusted mechanism, have the drab-colored *Horridions* of the *Living Age* been issued, forming four volumes in each year of over 800 pages, a clear and readable type, yet each page equal in quantity to two of the *Quarterly* or the *Edinburgh*. But the mere amount of letter press ought to be a secondary consideration. In this work it is. The taste, judgment, and nice tact displayed in the election of articles are above all praise, because they have never been equalled. MR. LITTELL has made it a point to choose not alone articles of immediate and of permanent interest. The biographical papers, concerning the living, as well as the dead, in these volumes, may particularly be spoken of as conveying a vast amount of information, which has been culled from hundreds of periodicals. But in nearly all points the work is perfectly encyclopaedic.

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NOTICES OF LITTELL'S LIVING AGE.

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Boston Journal.

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KATIE STEWART.

A True Story.

By
Miss Margaret F. Stewart.

[FROM BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.]

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KATIE STEWART

A TRUE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

"EH, Lady Anne! The like of you yammering morning and night about wee Katie at the mill. What's John Stewart! Naething but a common man, and you the Earl's dochter. I wonder ye dinna think shame."

"Whisht, Nelly," said the little Lady Anne.

"I'll no whisht. Didna Bauby Rodger speak for me to Lady Betty hersel to make me bairn's-maid; and am I to give you your ain gate now that I've gotten the place? I'll do no such thing; and ye shanna demean yoursel as lang as I can help it. I've been in as grand houses as Kellie Castle. I've had wee ladies and wee gentlemen to keep before now; and there's plenty o' them, no that far off, to haud ye in company; what would ye do wi' Katie Stewart?"

"I dinna like them; and eh, Nelly, she's bonnie!" answered little Annie Erskine.

"She's bonnie! Lady Anne, ye're enough to gar ony body think shame. What's ony lady's business wi' folk being bonnie?—no to say that it's a' in your ain een, and she's just like ither folk."

"Maybe, Nelly. She has rosy cheeks, and bonnie blue een, like you; but I like to look at her," said Lady Anne.

The despotic Nelly was mollified. "It's a' wi' guid wholesome diet, and rising in the morning. Ye ken yoursel how I have to fleesh ye wi' cream before ye'll take your parritch; and cream's no guid for the like of you. If ye were brought up like common folk's bairns, ye would have as rosy cheeks as Katie Stewart."

The little Lady Anne bent down by the burnside, to look at her own pale face in the clear narrow stream. "I'll never be

like Katie," said Anne Erskine with a sigh: "and Janet's no like Isabell Stewart; we're no so bonnie as them. Bring Katie up to the castle, Nelly; there's John Stewart at the mill door—ask him to let Katie up."

"But what will Lady Betty say?" asked the nurse.

"Betty said I might get her if I liked. She'll no be angry. See, Nelly, John Stewart standing at the door."

With reluctance the nurse obeyed; and leaving Lady Anne on the burnside, advanced to John Stewart.

The mill lay at the opening of a little uncultivated primitive-looking valley, through which the burn wound in many a silver link, between banks of bare grass, browned here and there with the full sunshine, which fell over it all the summer through, unshaded by a single tree. There was little of the beautiful in this view of Kellie Mill. A gray thatched house, placed on a little eminence, down the side of which descended the garden—a very unpretending garden, in which a few bushes of southernwood, and one or two great old rose trees, were the only ornamental features—was the miller's dwelling; and just beyond was the mill itself, interposing its droning musical wheel and little rush of water between the two buildings; while farther on, the bare grassy slopes, among which the burn lost itself, shut out the prospect—very rural, very still, giving you an idea of something remote and isolated—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot"—but with scarcely any beauty except what was in the clear skies over it, and the clear running water which mirrored the skies.

And on the burnside sits the little Lady Anne Erskine, the Earl of Kellie's youngest daughter. She says well that she will never be pretty; but you like the

quiet little face, though its features are small and insignificant, and its expression does not at all strike you, further than to kindness for the gentle owner, as she sits under the hot September sun, with her feet almost touching the water, pulling handfuls of grass, and looking wistfully toward the mill. A dress of some fine woolen stuff, shapeless and ungraceful, distinguishes her rank only very slightly: for the time is 1735, when fashions travel slowly, and the household of Kellie practices economy. Like the scene is the little lady; without much of even the natural beauty of childhood, but with a clear, soft, unclouded face, contented and gentle, thinking of every thing but herself.

Turn round the paling of the garden to the other side of this gray house, and the scene is changed. For the background you have a thick clump of wood, already brilliant in its autumn tints. Immediately striking your eye is a gorgeous horse-chestnut, embosomed among greener foliage—a bit of color for an artist to study. The trees grow on an abrupt green mound, one of the slopes of the little glen—the only one so becomingly sheltered; and from its steep elevation a little silvery stream of water falls down, with a continual tinkling, to the small pebbly bed below. Between this minstrel and the house spreads a “green” of soft thick grass, with poppies gleaming in the long fringes of its margin, and blue-eyed forget-me-nots looking up from the sod. One step up from the green on the steep ascent, which has been cut into primitive steps, brings you on a level with the mill-dam, and its bordering willows; and beyond shows you a wider horizon, bounded by the green swelling summit of Kellie Law, the presiding hill of the district, from which a range of low hills extends westward, until they conclude in the steep wooded front of Balcarras Craig, striking a bold perpendicular line across the sky. Rich fields and scattered farm-houses lie between you and the hills, and some of the fields are populous with merry companies of “shearers,” whose voices, softened by the distance, touch the ear pleasantly now and then. These lands were well cultivated and productive even at that time; and on this side of Kellie Mill, you could believe you were within the fertile bounds of the kingdom of Fife.

And the little figures on the green contrast strikingly with the young watcher

without. Foremost, seated in the deep soft grass, which presses round her on every side, with its long, bending, elastic blades, sits a child of some eight years with the soft cherub face which one sometimes sees in rural places, delicately tinted, beautifully formed. Round the little forehead clusters hair paler than gold, in curls, but in soft circlets like rings. Just a little darker as yet are the long eyelashes and finely marked brows; and the eyes are sunny blue, running over with light, so that they dazzle you. Her considerably browned, the little face, by the sun of this whole summer, and, perhaps just a shade too much of her color, has a slightly petulant, willful expression; but when you look at Katie Stewart, you can understand the situation of Lady Anne.

Only a little taller is that staid Isabel, who sits knitting a great woollen stocking by Katie's side. She is twelve, and her hair has grown a little darker, and she herself looks womanish as she sits and knits with painful industry, counting the loops as she turns the heel and passing now and then to calculate how much she has to do before she can escape from her task. The stocking is for her father; he has an immense one. Isabel thinks secretly, as she almost wails that some such process as that ever adopted by the sisters of Cinderella can be put in operation with honest John Stewart. But yonder he stands, a man, his ruddy face whitened over his fourteen stone of comfortable substantially needing all the foundation it has to stand upon; so Isabel returns to her knitting with such energy that the sound of her “wires” is audible at the mill; and John Stewart, turning round, looks proudly at his hairms.

Janet stands on the threshold of the house, peeping out; and Janet means looks so well as her sister. She has a heavier, darker face, a thick, gainly figure, and looks any thing but good-humored. They are all dressed in very primitive style, in home-made cloth with broad blue and white stripes. Their frocks are made in much the same form as the modern pinafore. But as its material is, Janet has the skirt of her dress folded up, and secured round the waist—“kilted,” as she calls it—extending a considerable stretch of blue and white petticoat below; for Janet has been

played in the house, by reason of her superior strength, assisting her mother and the stout maid-servant within.

Over Katie's red lip come little gushes of song, as she bends over the daisies in her lap, and threads them. The child does not know that she is singing; but the happy little voice runs on unconsciously, with quick breaks and interruptions like breath.

"Katie, I dinna ken what ye think ye're ganna to be," said the womanly elder sister. "Ye never do a turn; and it's no as if ye got onything hard. Woman, if I had the like of thae bonnie thread stockings to work instead of *this*, I would never stop till they were done!"

"But I'm no you, Bell," said Katie, running on without a pause into her song.

"Threading gowans!—they're of nae use in this world," continued the mentor.

"What is't for?"

"Just they're bonnie," said little Katie.

"They're bonnie!" Isabell received the excuse with as much contempt as Lady Anne's attendant had just done.

"Eh, Bell, woman!—eh, Katie!" exclaimed Janet, descending from the garden paling with a great leap, there's wee Lady Anne sitting on the burnside, and there's Nelly speaking to my father. She's wanting something; for, look at him, how he's pointing here? Eh, Bell, what will't be?"

"Weel, Nelly, gang in-by, and ask the wife," said the miller; "it's no in my hands. I never meddle wi' the bairns."

"The bairns! she's wanting some of us," cried Janet.

Isabell's stocking dropped on her knee, and they watched Nelly into the house; but little Katie threaded her gowans, and sang her song, and was happily unconscious of it all.

By-and-by, Mrs. Stewart herself appeared at the door. She was a little fair-haired woman, rather stout nowadays, but a beauty once; and with the pretty short-gown, held in round her still neat waist by a clean linen apron, and her animated face, looked yet exceedingly well, and vindicated completely her claim to be the fountain-head and original of the beauty of her children.

Isabell lifted her stocking as her mother, followed by Nelly, came briskly toward the green, and began to knit with nervous fingers, making clumsey noises with her wires. Janet stared at the approaching

figures stupidly with fixed eyes; while little Katie, pausing at last, suspended her chain of gowans over her round sunburnt arm, and lifted her sunny eyes with a little wonderment, but no very great concern.

"I'm sure it's no because she's of ony use at hame, that I should scruple to let her away," said Mrs. Stewart, "for she's an idle monkey, never doing a hand's turn from morning till night; but ye see she never hands hersel in right order, and she would just be a fash at the Castle."

At the Castle! Intense grows the gaze of Janet, and there is a glow on the face of the staid Isabell; but little Katie again unconsciously sings, and looks up with her sunny, wondering, unconcerned eyes into her mother's face.

"Nae fear; if she's no content, Lady Betty will send her hame," said the nurse; "but ye see Lady Anne, she's never done crying for little Katie Stewart."

There is a slight momentary contraction of Isabell's forehead, and then the flush passes from her face, and the wires cease to strike each other spasmodically, and she, too, looks up at her mother, interested, but no longer anxious. She is not jealous of the little bright sister—only Isabell yearns and longs for the universal love which Katie does by no means appreciate yet, and can not well understand how it is that Katie is always the dearest—always the dearest! It is the grandest distinction in the world, the other little mind muses unconsciously, and Isabell submits to be second with a sigh.

"Such a like sight she is, trailing about the burnside a' the hours of the day," exclaimed the mother, surveying Katie's soiled frock with dismay.

"Hout! Mrs. Stewart," said the patronizing nurse, "what needs ye fash aboot it? Naeboddy expects to see your little ane put on like the bairns that come about the Castle."

Mrs. Stewart drew herself up. "Thank ye for your guid opinion, Nelly: but I'll hae nobody make allowances for *my* bairn. Gang in to the house this moment, Katie, and get on a clean frock. It's Lady Anne that's wanting ye, and no a common body: and ye've forbears and kin of your ain as guid as most folk. Gang in this minute, and get yoursel sorted. Ye're to gang to the Castle with Lady Anne."

Reluctantly Katie rose. "I'm no waning to gang to the Castle! I'm no heeding about Lady Anne!"

"Eh, Katie!" exclaimed Isabell, under her breath, looking up to her wistfully; but the little capricious favorite could already afford to think lightly of the love which waited on her at every turn.

Mrs. Stewart had a temper—a rather decided and unequivocal one, as the miller well knew. "Ye'll do what you're bidden, and that this moment," she said, with a slight stamp of her foot. "Gang in, and Merran will sort ye; and see ye disobey me if ye daur!"

Isabell rose and led the little pouting Katie away, with a secret sigh. No one sought or cared for her, as they did for this little petulant, spoiled child; and Isabell, too, was pretty, and kind, and gentle, and had a sort of sad involuntary consciousness of those advantages which still failed to place her on the same platform with the favorite. Dull Janet, who was not pretty, envied little Katie; but Isabell did not envy her. She only sighed, with a blank feeling, that no one loved her, as every one loved her sister.

CHAPTER II.

"But Lady Betty never wears them, and what's the use o' a' thae bonnie things," asked little Katie, after the first burst of admiration was over, and she stood at leisure contemplating the jewels of the Ladies Erskine—not a very brilliant display, for the house of Kellie was any thing but rich.

"If we had had a king and queen o' our ain and no thae paughty Germans—or even if it werena for that weary Union, taking away our name from us—us that never were conquered yet, and wadna be if the hail world joined to do it—Lady Betty wad wear the braw family diamonds in the queen's presence-cha'mer," said Bauby Rodger, Lady Betty's maid; "but wha's gaun to travel a long sea-voyage for the sake of a fremd queen and a fremd court; And ye wadna hae ladies gaun glittering about the house wi'a' thae shining things on ilkadays, and naebody to see them. Na, na. Ye're but a wee bairn, Katie Stewart; ye dinna ken."

"But I think they're awfu' grand, Bauby, and I like that muckle ane the best. Do ye think the queen has as grand things as they?"

"Weel, I'll no say for this new queen,"

said the cauld Bauby. "She's only come of a wee German family, wi' nae no sae muckle, and naebody would daur say half as rich and fruitful, as this hae lands in Fife; but for our ain and queen—didna they gang covered owre her head to fit with pearls and rubies, and broideries of gold, and diamonds in the croon as big as my twa nieves."

And Bauby placed these same delicate "nieves," articles of the most feminine size, close together, and held them up; the admiring gaze of little Katie; Bauby was an enthusiast, and would have scorned the Koh-i-noor.

"Bauby," inquired the little niece, "am I to stay at the Castle?"

"Ye're up to the brae, my weel," was the indirect response. "Nae doubt your father's a very decent man and nae no an ill bairn yoursel, and come of a respectable folk; but there's mony a wee lass atween this and the sea would be glad to come to Kellie, to be bred up to Lady Anne: and it's to be naebody but you, Katie Stewart. My certy, ye're a favored bairn."

It seemed that Katie was slightly inclined to dispute this proposition, but she twisted up the hem of her little blue apron and held down her head and pouted, and she made no articulate reply.

"Where's little Katie?" cried Lady Anne, entering the room with a hasty eagerness which gave some color to her small pale face. "Katie, your mother has been in the drawing-room, and she says you're to stay."

But Katie still pouted, and still held a roll of the hem of her apron.

"You're no ill-pleased to stay with Katie?" whispered Lady Anne, seizing her arm round her little playmate's neck.

"But I'll never see my mother," said Katie, gradually bursting into a little reluctant fit of tears—"nor Bell, nor my burn. I dinna want to stay at the Castle. I want to gang hame."

"O, Katie, will ye no stay with me?" cried poor little Lady Anne, tightening her grasp, and joining in the tears.

But Katie, stoutly rebellious, slipped out of the grasp of her affectionate aunt and again demanded to go home.

"Hame, indeed! My certy, ye'll get plenty of hame if I had the power of ye," said Bauby Rodger. "Gang ye—just let her, Lady Anne—to work and sing, and learn the Single Carmin'"

sleep three in a bed. She was to have gotten the wee closet wi' the grand wee bed, and red curtains, and to have learned to dance and play the spinnet, and behave hersel, and see the first folk in the land. But let her gang hame. *I wadna stop her. She'll never be a lady; she'll learn to milk the cow, and gather the tatties, and marry a weaver out of Arncreoch!*"

Katie had been gradually drying her tears. "I'll no marry a weaver," exclaimed the child indignantly, with an angry flush on her face. "I'll no milk cows and work stockings. *I will* be a lady; and I dinna like ye, Bauby Rodger!"

"Weel, my woman, I'm no heeding," said Bauby, with a laugh, "but though ye dinna like me, ye canna hinder me doing what my lady bids. There's nae use fechting noo; for your face maun be washed, and ye maun gang in to Lady Betty's drawing-room and see your mother."

It was by no means an easy achievement, this washing of Katie's face; and the mild Lady Anne looked on in awe and wonder as her willful playfellow struggled in those great hands of Bauby's, to which she was wont to resign herself as into the hands of a giant—for Bauby was nearly six feet high, and proportionably thick and strong, with immense red hands, and an arm nearly as thick as Katie's waist. At last, with this great arm passed round Katie's neck, securing the pretty head with unceremonious tightness, the good-humored Glumdalca overpowered her struggling charge, and the feat was accomplished.

Glowing from the fresh clear water, and with those soft rings of hair a little disordered on her white temples, this little face of Katie's contrasted very strangely with Lady Anne's, as they went together through the great stately gallery to Lady Betty's drawing-room. Lady Anne had the advantage of height, and promised to be tall; while Katie's little figure, plump and round as it already was, gave no indication of ever even reaching the middle stature;—but the small dark head of the Earl's daughter, with its thoughtful serious expression, looked only like the shadow beside the sunshine, in presence of the infant beauty whose hand she held. Neither of them were tastefully dressed—the science was unknown then, so far as regarded children; but the quaint little old-woman garments pleased no less than amused

you, when you saw the bright child's face of Katie, while they only added to the gravity and paleness of the quiet Lady Anne.

This long, gaunt, dreary gallery—how the little footsteps echo through it! There is a door standing ajar. Who has dared to open the door of the great drawing-room?—but as it is open, quick, little Katie, look in.

Only once before has Katie had a glimpse of this magnificent apartment. It looks very cold—sadly dreary and death-like, especially as you know that that little black speck just appearing at the corner window is the point of the mournful escutcheon put up there, not a very long time ago, when Lady Kellie died; and somehow the room looks, with its dismal breathless atmosphere, as if solemn assemblies took place in it every night. Look at those couches, with their corners inclined toward each other, as if even now spectral visitants bent over to whisper in each other's ears; and here, beside this great, stiff, high-backed chair, is a little low one, with embroidered covers, looking as if some fair antique lady, in rustling silk and lace, had drawn it close to a stately matron's side, and was talking low and earnestly, craving or receiving counsel. Here some one, with heavy chair drawn apart, has been looking at that portrait. Has been looking!—one feels with an involuntary thrill, that leaning back on these velvet cushions, some presence to whom the fair Erskine, whose pictured face he contemplates upon the wall, was dear in the old times, may be looking now, though we see him not; and the fair Erskine perchance leans on his shoulder too, and smiles to see her portrait. Close the door reverently, children, and leave it to the dead.

In now through this matted passage to a room of much smaller dimensions, with windows looking over a fair green country to the far away sea; and this is a living-room, cheerful to see after the awe of the great drawing-room. At the side of the great hearth, in which a bright fire is burning, Lady Betty sits in a large arm-chair. She is not much above twenty, but seems to think it necessary that she should look very grave and composed in her capacity of head of the house—feminine head of the house, for Lord Kellie still lives and rules his household. Lady Betty's dress is of dark

silk, not the newest, and over it she wears a handkerchief of delicate white muslin, with a narrow embroidered border. A white muslin apron, with corresponding embroideries, covers the front of her dress, which has deep falling ruffles of lace at the elbows, and a stiff stomacher which you scarcely can see under those folds of muslin. Over her arms are drawn long black silk gloves without fingers, and she wears a ring or two of some value. Her head is like a tower with its waves of dark hair combed up from the brow, and her stature scarcely needs that addition, for all the Erskines are tall. Little Katie is really awed now, and feels that there is something grand in sheltering under the shadow of Lady Betty's wing.

Mrs. Stewart stands before Lady Betty engaged in earnest conversation with her. Not because Mrs. Stewart is humble, and chooses this attitude as the most suitable, but because Mrs. Stewart is earnest, and being in the habit of using the instrument of gesture a good deal, has risen to make it more forcible. One of her hands is lifted up, and she holds out the other, on which now and then she taps with her substantial fingers to emphasize her words.

"You see my lady, we have nae occasion to be indebted to ony body for the upbringing of our bairns. My man, I am thankful to say, is a decent man, and a well-doing, and, if we're spared, we'll have something to leave to them that come after us; but I dinna dispute the advantage of being brought up at the Castle. The Castle's ae thing, the mill's anither; but I must have my conditions, or Katie Stewart must come hame."

"Well, Mrs. Stewart, let me hear your conditions," said Lady Betty, graciously. "I have no doubt they are very sensible; let me hear them."

"She mustna be learned to lightlie her ain friends—they're a creditable kindred, no to be thought shame of. She's no to think herself better than Isabell and Janet, her ain sisters. She's to come to the mill aye when she can win, to keep her from pride she has nae right to. I'll not suffer the natural band to be broken, my lady; though she is to be brought up with Lady Anne, she's still just little Katie Stewart of Kellie Mill. That's my most special condition."

"Very right; no one could possibly object to it," said Lady Betty.

"And she's to get to the kirk. Your ladyship's maid could leave her at Ancreoch, and we'll meet her there on the road to Carnbee kirk, Lady Betty. She's at no hand to gang down to Pittavannet to the English chapel. I couldna see that."

"I will not ask you, Mrs. Stewart," said Lady Betty, gently.

"And she's to get nae questions but a right question-book. It's easy beating a mind of bairns, and I canna have her turned to the English way, my lady; I couldna do with that; but granting the conditions, and as lang as she's happy, keeps in her health, and behaves herself, I've nae objection to her staying at the Castle."

"Eh, Mrs. Stewart, I'm glad," claimed Lady Anne.

"But ye dinna say a word yourself, monkey," said the mother, drawing her forward. "Are you no proud of her asked to stay wi' Lady Anne at the Castle?"

Katie made a long pause, though anxious questioning eyes of Anne were upon her, and her mother's impatient fingers were beginning to tighten on her shoulder; for Katie was willful, and neither be coaxed nor coerced. At last her mingled feelings gained utterance slowly.

"I would like to be a lady," said Katie stoutly resisting her mother's endeavor to pull her a step forward; "but I like the mill, and I like the burnside—and you, mother."

Well for Katie that she added the last clause—it touched her mother's heart; and she interrupted the anathema which she was about to launch at the unoffending bairn.

"Bell will be better without ye—nothing but keep her idle; and the mill side winna rin away—ye can come and see it and me, Katie. We'll miss ye hame, for a' the little mischief ye are."

There was a slight quaver in Mrs. Stewart's voice; but now Lady Betty met that magnificent rustling sound which Katie seemed so grand and so awfully offer, with her own hand, a very good glass of wine.

In a corner near one of the windows an elaborately-carved escritoire, sat a young lady, so very silent that it was a long time before you became aware of her presence. Materials for some of the best works of the time lay on a little table beside her, but at present Lady Jane

writing, painfully copying some measured paragraphs out of one manuscript-book into another. Lady Betty, the young head and ruler of the house, was super-careful in "doing her duty" to her sisters; so Janet, now too old for writing copies, conscientiously spent an hour every day, under Lady Betty's own superintendence, in copying medicinal recipes to improve her hand.

One end of the room was filled with a great book-case of carved oak. On the other side stood a spinnet with fragile legs and ornaments of ivory. The middle of the apartment was carpeted, but round the sides you still saw the beautifully clear waxed floor, in which the light glimmered and unwary walkers slid. Great window-seats, with heavy soft cushions covered with dark velvet, lined the three windows at the other end, and an elaborate embroidered screen stood in the corner beside Lady Janet's escritoire. The walls were wainscoted, polished and glimmering like the floor, and some family portraits darkened rather than enlivened the sombre coloring of the room. But still it was a very grand room, and little Katie Stewart trembled, even when bidden to draw that tremendous lumbering velvet foot-stool which looked like a family-coach, to the fireplace, and to sit down on it, with her pretty head almost touching Lady Betty's knee.

CHAPTER III.

In the west room, which opens off this long dim gallery, Lady Anne Erskine sits busied with some embroidery. This apartment, too, is wainscoted, and has a slippery waxed floor, only partially carpeted, and the window is high up in the wall, and gives a singular prison-like aspect to the room. The light slants full on the dark head of Lady Anne, as she bends it very lightly over the embroidery frame, which has been raised so high that she may have light enough to work without much stooping. Quite in shadow lies this space under the window; but, near the middle of the room, the sunshine, streaming in from the western sky, makes a strong daguerotype of the heavy massive frame and little pannels of the casement. In this shady place stands Katie Stewart, holding a book high up in both her hands to reach the

light. She is fourteen now, and as tall as she will ever be, which is not saying much; but these blue sunny eyes, earnestly lifted to the elevated book, are as exuberant in light and mirth as ever, and are, indeed, such overflowing dancing eyes as one seldom sees in any other than an Irish face. Her hair has grown a little longer, and is no more permitted to stray about her white brow in golden rings, but is shed behind her ears, and put in ignoble thralldom. And, with all its infant beauty undiminished, the face has not lost the petulant, willful expression of its earlier childhood—the lips pout sometimes still, the soft forehead contracts—but tall, awkward, good Lady Anne looks down from her high seat upon little Katie, and watches the pretty changeable features with the quick observation of love.

The dress of both is considerably improved, for Katie now wears a fine woollen stuff called crape, and Lady Anne's gown is silk. With a point before and a point behind, the dresses fit closely around the waist, and the sleeves are short, and terminate at the elbow with a cuff of fine, snow-white linen. Lean and unhandsome are the arms of the quick-growing tall Lady Anne; but Katie's are as round and white as Anne's are angular, and look all the better for want of the long black lace gloves which her friend wears.

It is a very elaborate piece of embroidery this, over which Lady Anne bends, and has been the burden and oppression of four or five years bygone, for Lady Betty, who has had her full share in spoiling Katie Stewart, rigidly "does her duty" to her own young sister; and Anne has been forced to do her duty, and her embroidery too, many a fair hour, while Katie did little more than idle by her side.

But now hold up higher still, that it may catch the receding, fainter-shining light, this precious quarto, little Katie. Not very many books are to be had in Kellie Castle which the young ladies much appreciate—all the dearer is this *Gentle Shepherd*; and Lady Anne's embroidery goes on cheerfully as the sweet little voice at her side, with a considerable fragrance of Fife in its accent, reads aloud to her the kindly old-fashioned obsolete book. It was not old-fashioned then; for Lady Betty's own portrait, newly painted, represents her in the guise of a shepherdess, and little Katie sings songs about crooks and reeds, and Amintas and Chloes who "tend a

few sheep," and the sentiment of the time sees poetry only in Arcadia. So the two girls read their Allan Ramsay, and fancy there never was a story like the Gentle Shepherd.

Now it darkens, and higher and higher little Katie holds her book; but that daguerreotype on the floor of the bright window-panes, and strong marked bars of their frame, fades and grows faint;—and now Lady Anne not unwillingly draws her needle for the last time through the canvas, and little Katie elevates herself on tiptoe, and contracts her sunny brows with earnest gazing on the great dim page. Softly steps the Lady Anne from her high seat—softly, lest she should interrupt the reader, stirs the alumbering fire, till half-a-dozen dancing flames leap up and fill the room with ruddy, wavering light. So linger no longer to catch that dubious ray from the window, little Katie, but, with one light bound, throw yourself by the side of this bright hearth, and slant your great Allan Ramsay in the close embrace of your soft arms; while the good Lady Anne draws a low chair to the other side of the fire, and, clasping her hands in her lap, peacefully listens, and looks at the reader and the book.

You need no curtain for that high window—and now the strong bars of the casement mark themselves out against the clear frosty blue of the March sky, and stars begin to shine in the panes. A strange aspect the room has with those dark glimmering walls, and this uncurtained window. Deep gloomy corners shadow it all round, into which the fire sends fitful gleams, invading the darkness; and the centre of the room, between the hearth and the opposite wall, is ruddy and bright. Lady Anne, with her thin long arms crossed on her knee, sits almost motionless, reclining on her high-backed chair, and looking at Katie; while Katie, with one hand held up to shield her flushed face, embraces Allan Ramsay closely with the other, and reads. Neither of them, were they not absorbed in this wonderful book, would like to sit in the dark room alone with those mysterious shadowy corners, and that glimmering door slightly swaying to and fro with the draught from the windy gallery. But they are not here, these two girls; they are out among the summer glens and fields, beside the fragrant burn-side with Peggie, or on the hill with the Gentle Shepherd.

But there is a heavy foot in the passage, pacing along toward the west door, and immediately the glimmering door is thrown open, and with a resounding step enters Bauby Rodger.

"Save us! are ye a' in the dark as lady?" exclaimed Bauby; "never let ye get wi' that weary book; but I'll do something to rouse ye, Lady Anne." He laid out Lady Betty's wedding gown in the state chamber, and it's the greatest looking thing ever ye saw. Lady Anne herself is in the drawing-room wi' me. If ye want to see't afore it's on, ye're gang now."

Lady Anne was docile, and rose to her hand as Bauby proceeded to light the way.

But Katie contracted her brows, clinging to her book. "I want to see the Peggie. Never mind Lady Betty; we'll see it in the morn, Lady Anne."

"Do what ye're bidden, Miss Anne," advised Bauby Rodger in an impatient tone.

"What I'm bidden! I'm no Lady Anne maid like ye," retorted Katie.

"Nobody means that; never mind the by," said Lady Anne entreatingly; "would do any thing you asked me, and will you come now for me?"

Again the sunny brows contracted—the little obstinate hand held fast by the skirt—and then Katie suddenly sprang to her feet. "I'll do what you want me, Lady Anne—I'll aye do what you want for you never refuse me."

The lamp was lighted by this time—fully revealed Katie's flushed face to the scrutiny of Bauby Rodger.

"Oh, Miss Katie, the like o' that! claimed the careful guardian; "sae wi' sitting on the fire! And what will Lady Betty say to me, think ye, if she sees it, for letting ye get sae muckle o' the way?"

Katie made no answer; she only smiled half in mirth, half in anger, a lock of her red hair which had escaped from Bauby's close cap, and then, taking Lady Anne's hand, hurried her away at an undignified pace, singing as she went, "daunt me, daunt me," in a low, sweet, and somewhat plaintive tone.

"Anne canna be angry at that," said Bauby to herself, as she banished the stray tress unceremoniously under her cap; "she has mair spunk in her finger than Lady Anne has in a her, and she's a mischievous, ill-deed."

but yet a body canna but like the little ane. Pity them that have the guiding o' her when she comes to years, for discreet years she'll never see."

Whereupon Bauby, to console herself, caught up the distant music which she heard passing through the long gallery; and being a desperate Jacobite, and traitor to the established government, sang with energy the concluding verse—

"To see King James at Edinburgh cross
Wi' fifty thousand foot and horse,
And the usurper forced to flee,
Oh that is what maist would wanton me!"

In the chamber of state a lamp was burning which revealed Lady Betty's wedding gown radiant in its rich stiff folds, spread at full length upon the bed for the inspection of the new comers. But at the foot of the bed, leaning upon the heavy massy pillar which supported the faded splendor of its canopy, stood a figure very unlike the dress. It was Lady Janet Erskine, now a tall, pale, rather graceful young woman of two-and-twenty—of a grave, kind temper, whose quietness hid very deep feelings. Lady Janet's arms were clasped about the pillar on which she leaned, and her slight figure shook with convulsive sobs. As the girls entered, she hurriedly untwined her arms, and turned away, but not before the quick observant Katie had seen her eyes red with weeping, and discovered the uncontrollable emotions, which could scarcely be coerced into absolute silence, even for the moment which sufficed her to hasten from the room.

"Eh, Katie, is it not bonnie?" said Lady Anne.

Katie replied not, for her impatient, curious, petulant mind burned to investigate the mystery; and the sympathies of her quick and vivid nature were easily roused. Katie did not care now for the wedding gown; the sad face of Lady Janet was more interesting than Lady Betty's beautiful dress.

But a very beautiful dress it was. Rich silk, so thick and strong that, according to the vernacular description, it could "stand its lane;" and of a delicate color, just bright and fresh enough to contrast prettily with the elaborate white satin petticoat which appeared under the open robe in front. At the elbows were deep graceful falls of rich lace; but Katie scarcely could realize the possibility of the grave Lady Betty appearing in a costume so magnificent. She was to appear in it, however,

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no later than to-morrow; for to-morrow the wise young head of the household was to go away, and to be known no more as Lady Betty Erskine, but as Elizabeth, Lady Colville. The intimation of this approaching change had been a great shock to all in Kellie; but now, in the excitement of its completion, the family forgot for the moment how great their loss was to be.

"And to-morrow, Katie, is Lordie's birth-day," said Lady Anne, as they returned to the west room.

On the low chair which Lady Anne had left by the fireside, the capacious seat of which contained the whole of his small person, feet and all, reposed a child, with hair artificially curled round his face, and a little mannish, formal suit, in the elaborate fashion of the time.

"The morn's my birth-day," echoed the little fellow. "Mamma's to gie me grand cakes, and I'm to wear a braw coat and a sword, and to be Lord Colville's best man; for Lord Colville will be my uncle, Katie, when he marries Auntie Betty."

"Whisat, Lordie, you're not to speak so loud," said Katie Stewart.

"What way am I no to speak so loud? Mamma never says that—just Auntie Anne and Auntie Janet; but I like you, Katie, because you're bonnie."

"And Bauby says you're to marry her. Lordie, when you grow a man," said Lady Anne.

"Ay, but mamma says no; for she says Katie's not a grand lady, and I'm to marry naebody but a grand lady; but I like Katie best, for all that."

"I wouldna marry you," retorted the saucy Katie; "for I'll be a big woman, Lordie, when you're only a bairn."

"Bauby says you'll never be big. If you were as old as Auntie Betty, you would aye be wee," said the little heir.

Katie raised her hand menacingly, and looked fierce. The small Lord Erskine burst into a loud fit of laughter. He, too, was a spoiled child.

"I'll be five the morn," continued the boy; "and I'm to be the best man. I saw Auntie Janet greeting. What makes her greet?"

"Lordie, I wish you would speak low!" exclaimed Lady Anne.

"Mamma says I'm to be Earl of Kellie, and I may speak any way I like," returned the heir.

"But you shanna speak any way you

like!" cried the rebellious Katie, seizing the small lord with her soft little hands, which were by no means destitute of force. "You shanna say any thing to vex Lady Janet!"

"What for?" demanded Lordie, struggling in her grasp.

"Because I'll no let you," said the determined Katie.

The spoiled child looked furiously in her face, and struck out with his clenched hand; but Katie grasped and held it fast, returning his stare with a look which silenced him. The boy began to whimper, and to appeal to Lady Anne; but Lady Anne, in awe and admiration, looked on and interfered not, fervently believing that never before had there been such a union of brilliant qualities as now existed in the person of Katie Stewart.

CHAPTER IV.

"BUT what makes Lady Janet greet?" Katie could not answer the question to her own satisfaction.

Poor Lady Janet! A certain Sir Robert had been for a year or two a constant visitor at Kellie; his residence was at no great distance; and he had lost no opportunity of recommending himself to the quiet, intense Janet Erskine. He was a respectable, average man; handsome enough, clever enough, attractive enough, to make his opportunities abundantly sufficient for his purpose; and for a while Lady Janet had been very happy. But then the successful Sir Robert began to be less assiduous, to come seldom, to grow cold; and Janet drooped and grew pale uncomplainingly, refusing, with indignation, to confess that any thing had grieved her. The Earl had not noticed the progress of this affair, and now knew no reason for his daughter's depressed spirits and failing health; while Lady Betty, sadly observing it all, thought it best to take no open notice, but rather to encourage her sister to overcome an inevitable sorrow.

But the Lady Erskine, Lordie's widowed mother, thought and decided differently. At present she was rather a super-numerary, unnecessary person in Kellie; for Lady Betty's judicious and firm hand held the reins of government, and left her sister-in-law very little possibility of inter-

ference. This disappointment of Janet was quite a godsend for Lady Erskine—she took steps immediately of the most peremptory kind.

For hints, and even lectures, had an effect on Sir Robert, when she appeared. Less and less frequent became his visits—paler and paler grew the cheeks of Janet, and Lady Erskine thought it was perfectly justified in her *coup-de-main*.

So she wrote to an honorable minister Erskine, who, knowing very little about his younger sister, did perfectly agree with his brother's widow, that a good settlement for Janet was exceedingly desirable, and that an opportunity for securing it was by no means to be neglected. He wrote—he came, and with him the end of Janet Erskine's fate.

For the faithless Sir Robert and his diligent brother had some private conversation; and thereafter Sir Robert sought his forsaken lady, and, by his charming manner, revived for a little her drooping heart; but then a strange proposal came harshly on Lady Janet's ear. Her lover had interfered. To escape from his interference, Sir Robert proposed that the long-delayed marriage should be hurried—immediate—secret; and that she should leave Kellie with him that very night. "That there may be no collision between your brother and myself." Fatal were these words, and they sank like so many stones into Janet Erskine's heart.

And for this the little, loud, spiteful Lordie had seen her weeping—for Katie had observed those terrible scenes. The poor fated Lady Janet!—thus compelled to take the cold and reluctant bride, which only under compulsion was offered to her, now feeling more than ever that the heart was lost. To elope to mock the wild expedient of passion with these hearts of theirs—the one cooled with indifference, the other paralyzed with misery. It was a sad fate.

And if she hesitated—if she refused, then, alas! to risk the life of the beloved brother—the life of the cold Sir Robert—to lose the life of one. So there was no help or rescue for her, wherever she fled; and, with positive anguish throbbing in her heart, she prepared for her flight.

It is late at night, and Katie Stewart is very wakeful, and can not rest. Through her little window look the stars, cold and pale, for the sky is frosty, clear, and cold. Katie has lain long, turned

meet those unwearying eyes, her own wide open wakeful ones, and feeling very eerie, and just a little afraid—for certainly there are steps in the gallery without, though all the house has been hushed and at rest for more than one long hour.

So, in a sudden paroxysm of fear, which takes the character of boldness, Katie springs from her little bed, and softly opens the door. There are indeed steps in the gallery, and Katie, from her dark corner, sees two stealthy figures creeping toward the stair, from the door of Lady Janet's room. But Katie's fright gradually subsides, and melts into wonder, as she perceives that Bauby Rodger, holding a candle in her hand, and walking with such precaution as is dreadful to see, goes first, and that it is quite impossible to prevent these heavy steps of hers from making some faint impression on the silence.

And behind her, holding up with fingers which tremble sadly the heavy folds of that long riding-skirt, is not that Lady Janet? Very sad, as if her heart were breaking, looks Lady Janet's face; and Katie sees her cast wistful, longing glances toward the closed door of Lady Betty's room. Alas! for there peacefully, with grave sweet thoughts, unfearing for the future, untroubled for the past, reposes the bride who shall go forth with honor on the morrow; while here, with her great grief in her face, feeling herself guilty, forsaken, wishing nothing so much as to close her eyes this night forever, pauses her innocent, unhappy sister—a bride also, and a fugitive.

And so the two figures disappear down the stair. Cold, trembling, and afraid, Katie pauses in her corner. But now the gallery is quite dark, and she steals into her room again, where at least there are always the stars looking in unmoved upon her vigils; but it is a very restless night for Katie.

Very early, when the April morning has not fairly dawned, she is up again. Still interested, still curious, eager to discover what ails Lady Janet, and where she has gone.

The hall below is quite still; no one is yet up in the castle, important as this day is; and Katie steals down the great staircase, on a vague mission of investigation. Upon a little table in the hall, under those huge antlers which frown so ghost-like in the uncertain morning light, stands the candlestick which Bauby Rodger carried last night; and, as Katie's curiosity examines the only tangible sign that what

she saw was real, and not a dream, and sees that the candle in it has burnt down to the socket and wasted away, she hears a step behind her—although Katie recoils with some fear, when she beholds again the omnipresent Bauby.

"What gars ye rise sae early?" exclaimed Bauby, with some impatience. "It's no your common way, Katie Stewart. Eh me! eh me!" added the faithful servant of Kellie, looking at the candlestick, and wringing her great hands.

"What ails ye, Bauby?"

"It's been loot burn down to the socket—and it's a' my wyte! Gude forgie me!—how was I to mind a' thing? The light's burn't out; but ye dinna ken what that means. And what gars ye look at me, bairn, wi' sic reproachfu' een?"

"What does't mean, Bauby?" asked Katie Stewart.

"It's the dead of the house—this auld house of Kellie," said Bauby mournfully. "When a light's loot waste down to the socket, and die of itsel', it's an emblem of the house. The race maun dwine away like the light, and gang out in darkness. Oh that it hadna been my blame!"

"But Bauby, I couldna sleep last night, and I saw ye. Where were ye taking Lady Janet?"

"The bairn's in a creel," said Bauby, starting. "Me take Lady Janet ony gate! It's no my place."

"Ay, but ye were, though," repeated Katie; "and she lookit sward, sward to gang."

"Weel, weel, she bid to gang; ye'll hear the haill story some time," said Bauby, lifting her apron to her eyes. "That I should be the ane to do this—me that have eaten their bread this mony a day—that it should be my blame!"

And Bauby, with many sighs, lifted away the unfortunate candlestick.

They went up-stairs together to the west room, where Bauby began to break up the "gathered" fire for Katie's benefit, lamenting all the time, under her breath, "that it should be me!" At last she sat down on the carpet, close to the hearth, and again wrung her great hands, and wiped a tear from either eye.

"There's naething but trouble in this world," sighed Bauby; "and what is to be, maun be; and lamenting does nae good."

"But, Bauby, where's Lady Janet?" asked little Katie.

Bauby did not immediately answer

She looked into the glowing caverns of the newly-awakened fire, and sighed again.

"Whisht, Miss Katie," said Bauby Rodger; "there's naething but trouble every place, as I was saying. Be thankful ye're only a bairn."

But, indeed, the little curious palpitating heart could be any thing but thankful, and rather beat all the louder with eagerness and impatience to enter these troubles for itself.

That day was a day full of excitement to all in Kellie, household and guests, and any thing but a happy one. Many tears in the morning, when they discovered their loss—a cloud and shadow upon the following ceremony, which Katie wonderingly, and with decided secret antagonism, and a feeling of superiority, saw performed by a surpliced Scottish bishop; and a dreary blank at night, when, all the excitement over, those who were left felt the painful void of the two vacant places. But the day passed, and the next morning rose very drearily; so Katie, glad to escape from the dim atmosphere of Kellie, put on the new gown which Lady Betty had given her, with cambric ruffles at the sleeves, and drew her long gloves over her arms, and put her little ruffled-hooded black silk mantle above all; and with shoes of blue morocco, silver-buckled, on her little feet, went away to Kellie Mill to see her mother.

Down the long avenue, out through that coroneted gate; and the road now is a very common-place country road, leading you by-and-by through the village of Arncreoch. This village has very little to boast of. The houses are all thatched, and of one story, and stand in long, shabby, parallel rows, on each side of the little street. No grass, nor flowers, nor other component of pretty cottages, adorns these habitations. Each has a kailyard at the back; it is true; but the aspect of that is very little more delightful than this rough causeway, with its *dubs* in front. A very dingy little primitive shop, where is sold every thing, graces one side, and at the other is the Kellie Arms. Children tumble about at every open door; and through many of the uncurtained windows you see a loom; for Arncreoch is a village of weavers, on which the fishing towns on the coast, and the rural people about it, look down with equal contempt. Little Katie, in her cambric ruffles and silk mantle, rustles proudly through the plebeian

village; and, as she daintily picks her steps with those resplendent shoes of her remembrance, with a blush of shame, she had been thought possible that she should marry a weaver!

But no weaver is this young rural mate who overtakes her on the road. It is Philip Landale, a laird, though his possessions are of no great size, and he himself farms them. He is handsome, young, well-mannered, and a universal favorite; but little Katie's face flushes angrily when he addresses her, for he speaks as if he were a child.

And Katie feels that she is no child; that already she is the best dancer in the parish, and could command partners innumerable; not to speak of having her taste, in a slight degree, the delight of flirtation. So Katie scorns, with her whole heart, the good-humored condescension of young Kilbrachmont.

But he is going to Kellie Mill, and the young coquette has to walk with dignity and with a certain disdain, which Landale does not notice, being little interested in the same, by his side. Softly rises Kellie Law, softly, rounded by the white clouds which float just over the top of the green gentle hill; and there is a long range of his lower brethren stretching to the west, where Balcarras Craig greets them with his bold front, and clothes his breast with foliage, to save him from the winds. There is nothing imposing in the scene; but it is fine, and fresh, and beautiful—vivid with the young verdure of the spring.

But you look at your blue morocco shoes, little Katie, with their silver buckles glancing in the sun, and settle your mantle over the white arm which shows through its black lace glove, and have eyes for the country; and Philip Landale strikes down the thistles on the road, with the heavy end of the whip he carries, and smiles good-humoredly, and does not know what to say; and now as the rough, almost impassable road, worn in deep ruts by the carts which constantly come and go, bringing gain to the mill, they have come in sight of Kellie Mill.

CHAPTER V.

ISABELL STEWART is nineteen now, one of the beauties of Fife. Her eyes

her hair are darker than Katie's, her graceful figure a little taller, her manner staid and grave, as it used to be when she was a child; and though every one speaks kindly of Isabell, and she is honored with consideration and respect more than belong to her years, she seems to lack the power, somehow, of grasping and holding fast the affection of any. Isabell has no young friends—no wooers; thoughtful, gentle, serious, she goes about alone, and still in her heart there is the old sad consciousness, the old vague yearning for dearer estimation than falls to her lot. She does not envy any one, nor grudge her little sister Katie the universal love which attends her; but Isabell thinks she is incapable of creating this longed-for affection, and sometimes in quiet places, over this thought, sheds solitary tears.

Janet's looks, too, have improved; still heavier, thicker, and less graceful than her sisters, Janet, in her ruddy, boisterous health, is a rural belle—has already, now being seventeen, troops of "joes," and rather triumphs over the serious Isabell. The beauties of the Milton, the three are called; and they deserve the title.

The house-door is open. Without any intervention of hall or passage, this straightforward door introduces you to the family apartment, which is no parlor, but a kitchen, tolerably sized, extending the whole length of the house. It is the afternoon, and every thing looks well-ordered and "redd up," from the glittering plates and china which you see through the open doors of the oak "aumrie" in the corner, to the white apron and shining face of Merran, the servant at the Mill. The apartment has a window at each end—a small greenish window of thick glass, which sadly distorts the world without when you look through. But it is very seldom that any one looks through, for the door is almost always open, admitting the pure daylight and unshadowed sun.

At the further window Janet stands before a clean deal table, making cakes—oat-cakes, that is; for all manufactured of wheaten flour are scones or bannocks. Janet has a special gift for this craft, and her gown is still tucked up, and so are her sleeves, that the ruddy round arms may be used with more freedom. The girdle is on the bright fire, and Merran superintends the baking, moving almost incessantly between the fireplace and the table. Much talk, not in the lowest tone,

is carried on between Merran and Janet. They are decidedly more familiar than Mrs. Stewart approves.

At the other window the staid Isabell sits knitting stockings. Now and then you hear her, in her quiet voice, saying something to her mother, who bustles in and out, and keeps up a floating stream of remark, reproof, and criticism on every thing that is going on. But Isabell takes little part in Janet's conversation: a slight cloud shades her brow sometimes, indeed, as the long laugh from the other end of the room comes harshly on her ear; for these two sisters are little like each other.

It is again a great woolen stocking which Isabell knits; and fastened to her waist is a little bunch of feathers, which she calls her "sheath," and in which she secures her wire. Her gown is made of dark-striped linen, open in front, with a petticoat of the same material appearing below; and of the same material is the apron, neatly secured about her round, slender waist. Her soft brown hair is bound with a ribbon just a little darker than itself, and her eyes are cast down upon her work, so that you can not perceive how dark their blue has grown, until, suddenly startled by a voice without, she lifts them to throw a hurried glance toward the door, where even now appears the little splendid Katie, with Philip Landale and his riding-whip close behind.

Over Isabel's lip there escapes a half-audible sigh. Little Katie, then, is first with Philip Landale too.

"And were ye at the marriage, bairn?" inquired Mrs. Stewart; "and was't awfu' grand?—and how did the prelatie minister do?"

"And eh, Katie!" exclaimed Janet, pressing forward with her mealy hands, "what a' had Lady Betty on?"

"She had on a grand gown, a' trimmed wi' point-lace, and a white satin petticoat, and the grandest spangles and gum-flowers on her train; but oh, mother," said little Katie, "Lady Janet's run away!"

"Run away! What are ye meaning, ye monkey?" said Mrs. Stewart.

"The night before last, when it was dark, and a'body in their beds, I saw Lady Janet gang down through the gallery, out of her ain room; and she had on her riding-skirt, and was looking awfu' white, like as if her heart would break; and no lang after the hail house was up, and she was away."

"Keep me!—the night before her sister was married! Was she in her right mind, think ye?" said Mrs. Stewart.

"Had she cast out with them? Where would she go, Katie?" said Isabell.

"Eh, wha did she rin away with?" asked the experienced Janet.

"It was with Sir Robert. She's married now, mother, as well as Lady Betty," said Katie; "but I dinna think she was glad."

Janet laughed, but no one else ventured to join her.

"Glad! it would ill set her, leaving her faither's house in such a like manner. Gae way to your basking, Janet, ye haverel," said Mrs. Stewart. "My certy, Katie, lass, but you're a grand lady, wi' your white ribbons and your new gown. I'll no have ye coming to my quiet house, to set Isabell and Janet daft about the fashions."

"But Isabell has as braw a cloak as me, mother," said Katie, complacently looking down upon her ruffled black silk mantle as she took it off.

"And cambric ruffles, nae less!—dead-fine cambric! Weel, my woman, see ye guide them weel; for, except ye hae a man o' your ain to work for ye, ye'll no get mony cambric frills out of Kellie Mill."

"The beauties of the Milton have less need than most folk of ruffles or brows," modestly said the young laird.

"Eh, Kilbrachmont, haud your peace, and dinna pit havers in their heads. There's plenty pride in the nature o' them, without helping't out wi' flattery. Beauties o' the Milton, said he!, I mind twa lassies ance—ay, just mysel and Maisdry, my sister, if ye will hae't, Katie—that were as weel-favored as ever stood in your shoon; and didna want folk to tell us that either, ony mair than our neighbors; but ne'er a body beautied us."

"No for want o' will," insinuated the young yeoman; "and if they ca'ed ye not beauty, it might be because they had a bonnier word."

"Weel, I'll no say," said the little comely house-mother, with a slight elevation of her head. "Sit down to the wheel, Katie, and gie it a ca' the time I'm in the aumrie. What's to come of this lassie, I ken not; for ne'er a decent-like thing is she learned to do. Na, Lady Anne hersel is never held in such idleset; and what will ye do, ye monkey, if ye ever get a man and a house of your ain?"

"I'll gar him keep maids to me, and buy me bonnie things," retorted little Katie, taking her seat at the wheel.

"Keep maids to ye? Set ye up! If ye're e'en as weel off as your mother was before ye, I'll say it's mair than ye've a right to expect; for I'll wad ye a pair o' new ruffles, I was worth half-a-dozen hired women the first day I steppit on my ain hearth-stane, baith to my ma and mysel; and ye'll ne'er be worthy o' the like o' your faither, John Stewart, Kirk or else I'm sair mista'en."

Little Katie turned the wheel with petulant haste, and pouted. John Stewart!—yonder he stands, honest man, with his broad bonnet shading his ruddy face newly returned from the market—again and in his Sabbath dress. But Katie thinks of the Honorable Andrew Carnegie and the grand English Sir Edward had been at Lady Betty's marriage the day before; and instinctively the beauty draws herself up, and thinks of Peggie in the *Gentle Shepherd*, and of a heroine more; for Katie now looks quite as well as Lady Anne, that the Kirkines, though they are an earl's daughters will never look a twentieth part as well as the three sisters of Kellie Mill.

"I think some ane has sent Kilbrachmont here on an errand, and the purr—has lost mind o't on the road," said Janet, now coming forward with her dress smoothed down, and her hands no longer covered with meal. "Maister Philip Landale's a-be that clue; and Isabell there, she sees that she's lost it out of her lap."

Young Landale started from his reverie. "Troth, I saw nae clue, Janet: ye're quicker e'en than me."

"There it is, and the guid yarn is twisted in that lang whip o' yours. We'll gar ye bring such things into the house, Isabell, canna ye mind your ain work? no hae folk aye needing to look after? There, it's broken! and ye'll need another fastening in that heel."

"Weel, Janet, I'll fash naebody," said Isabell, quietly gathering up into her lap the clue, with its long raveled end.

"It ought to be me that got the trouble," said young Landale, shyly, looking at the elder sister; "for I hear mair than Janet say my whip's aye in the gut, but it's just a custom, ye see."

"When ye dinna ken what to say, suggested the malicious Janet.

"Weel, maybe ye're not far wrong."

and young Kilbrachmont, again casting a wae-long glance at Isabell, whom he had not yet directly addressed. "I'm no that ill at speaking in most houses; but for a' the minister says, ye'll no convince me that the fairy glamour is clean gane from this world, or ever will be; for a'ne can speak ready enough when a'ne doesna care twa straes what folk think o't; while in anither place we make fuils o' oursel's beyond re-meid, out of pure anxiousness to look weel in somebody's een. It just maun be, I would say, a witchcraft somegate in the air."

Isabell had never looked up; for this turning of the heel, be it known to the ignorant, is a crisis in the history of a stocking; but her usually pale forehead was crimson to the hair, and her eyelids drooped heavily as she bent over her work, which was particularly complicated just now, as several loops had dropped, and it was no easy job, with those nervous fingers of hers, to gather them up again.

"I see the guidman, Kilbrachmont," said Mrs. Stewart, at last emerging from behind the carved door of the aumrie with a large square bottle in her hand. "It's weel he's come in time to countenance ye with your dram, amang a' us womenfolk; and it's real Hollands—grand stuff, they tell me, though I'm nae judge mysel."

"No that ill—no that ill, guidwife," said the miller, as he entered. "I would take a guid stoup on your warranty, though ye are naething but a woman. Guid e'en to ye, Kilbrachmont; but is this a' ye're to gie us to our fourhours, Bell?"

"I'm gaun to make some tea for the bairns and me; but ye'll no heed about that," said the house-mother. "And, man, John, do ye no see Katie in a' her braws?"

"How's a' wi' ye, lassie?" said the father, kindly. "But I wadna ken ye to be a bairn of mine, if I didna see the bit face. And Katie, if any body says ye're owre braw to be the Miller of Kellie's daughter, aye do you tell them you're owre bonnie to be any body's else."

"Hear to his vanity! As if any body could see a feature of him in the bairn's haill face!" cried Mrs. Stewart.

But little Katie sat in meditative silence, and turned her wheel. The wheel was a light one, and handsomely made—a *chef-d'œuvre* of the country wright, who, among many more, was a candidate for the favor of Janet Stewart. This pretty wheel was the musical instrument of Kellie Mill.

Enter the room when you would—at early morning, or when the maker of it and his rivals stole in at night, to form a lingering group round the ruddy centre of the kitchen, made bright by the light from the fireplace—you always heard the soft whirr of the wheel, brought to a climax now and then by the sharp slipping of the band, or lengthened hum with which it rebounded when all the yarn was spun. In silence now at the wheel sits little Katie, passing the thread dreamily through her fingers, and taking in all they say, only half-conscious that she does so, into her mind the while.

"There's nae news, Janet—nae news particular I hear o' in Anster," said the miller, in answer to several inquiries; "but I saw Beelyo Oliphant doun-by; he was asking kindly for ye a', and special for Isabell."

There was no answer; the flush fled in a moment from Isabell's cheeks, and other loops were dropt in her stocking. Janet alone ventured to laugh, and again the long cord of young Kilbrachmont's whip began to curl uneasily about the floor.

"The like of that man for sense is no to be found, I'll take my aith o't, in the haill kingdom of Fife," said John Stewart with emphasis.

"Weel, miller, weel," said young Landale hastily, "naebody says onything against it. No mony thanks to him; he's as auld as Kellie Law, and what should ail him to be sensible? It's the special quality folk look for in auld men."

"They dinna aye get it, though," said the miller. "They're selling that tea-water, Isabell, for sixpence a cup in Siller-dyke, and muckle the fisher lads yonder-awa' think o't for a treat, ye may suppose; but I didna think *you* would thole such wastry in this house."

"Mind you your mill, guidman—I'll mind the house," said his wife significantly, "and we'll see whilk ane of us has the maist maistry owre our dominions at the year's end. I got the tea in a present, and Katie comesna ilka day. Make your toddy, John Stewart, and haud your peace."

"Aweel, aweel—nocht's to be won at woman's hand," said the miller. "Draw in your chair, Kilbrachmont, and gie us your news. Hout, man, ye're in nae hurry?"

"Weel," said Landale, with very indifferently assumed reluctance, "if ye *will*

keep me, I can give Katie a convoy to Kellie gate."

Katie! A cloud fell again, dimly, sadly, over the face of Isabell. A moment before there had been a tremulous happiness upon it, not usual to see there. Now she cast a wistful, affectionate look at the little pretty sister musing over the wheel, and drawing the thread slowly through her hand. There is no envy in the look, and Katie, suddenly glancing up, meets it with wondering eyes—sorrowful, inquiring—Whence have you this magic, little sister? How is it that they all love you?

CHAPTER VI.

"I THINK he's courting our Isabell," said Katie, softly to herself, as the young laird of Kilbrachmont left her at Kellie gate. The night was frosty and the stars clear. Faint light and faint shadow fell across that homeward path of hers, for there was no moon to define the great trees on either side of the way; but a very little mysterious wind went whispering in and out among the boughs, with a faint echoing sigh, as though it said, "Poor me." Katie was used to those long, still, solitary roads; but a little thrill of natural timidity made her hurry through the dark avenue, and long to see the light from the uncurtained window of the west room; and the same feeling prompted her anxious endeavor to occupy her mind and thoughts with something definite, and so keep away from her memory the eerie stories which abounded then about all rural places even more than they do now.

"He's courting our Isabell," repeated Katie, under her breath, laboring to fix upon this proposition those discursive thoughts which *would* bring back to her mind the popular ghost of one of the little coast towns in the neighborhood. Only a month ago, David Steele, Bauby Rodger's sister's husband, had seen the Red Slippers in Pittenweem; and Katie's heart leapt to her lips as something rustled on the ground a little way before her, and she paused in terror, least these very Red Slippers should be taking their ghostly exercise by her side; but it was only a great, stiff, red oak leaf, which the new bud had thrust forth from the branch to which all the winter it had clung with enacious grasp of death; and quick-

ening her pace still a little, Katie hurried on.

But the fact that young Kilbrachmont had designs on Isabell was not of sufficient interest to keep her mind engaged, and Katie began to sing to herself as she went, half running, over the customary woe. The song was about Susan and Chloe, after the fashion of the time, but the air was a sweet Lowland one, as there were pretty lines in the verse, though they did come too distinctly to Arcadia. As she sang, her heart lay placidly, and usual fancies returned to her mind—the grand English Sir Edward, the Honorable Andrew; but a grander Sir Edward—a more accomplished, handsomer, blither, loftier gentleman—was yet to come, attended by a many inary splendors, to make a lady of Katie Stewart.

There now is the light from the west room, cheering the young wayfarer, as now Bauby Rodger's very real and sentimental voice calls from a little side entrance to Mally, one of the maids in the kitchen, suspected at present to be keeping tryst behind the garden hedge with a fisher lad who has walked a dozen times to-night for sake of this same tryst. It has not the slightest intention of disturbing it to be disturbed so soon. Within ear and hearing of home, little Katie ventures to linger on her way, and again she thinks of young Kilbrachmont and Beelye Oliphant and Isabell.

Beelye or Bailie Oliphant is a dignitary of the little town of Anstruther, on the coast—a man of substance and influence in his sphere; and John Stewart has been for some time coquetting with him about another Mill-town, very near Anstruther of which the bailie is landlord, and which the miller thinks would be a better speculation than his mill at Kellie. Unfortunately, in the course of these transactions about the mill, the respectable bailie has seen Isabell Stewart, and the old man thinks she would make a "douce" and refined wife, worthy the lands and tenements with which he could endow her. So also thinks the miller; and Isabell has heard so much on the subject, that her heart is near the breaking sometimes especially when Philip Landale steals in in the evening, and hears it all, and plays with his whip, and speaks to no one.

But it is only for a few minutes that Katie can afford to think of, or be ac-

for the pale face of her elder sister; and now she has emerged from the avenue, and Bauby Rodger, springing out from the side-door and the darkness, pounces upon the little wanderer like a great lion upon a mouse.

"Is this you, Mally? Ye little cuttie! to have lads about the house at this hour at e'en, as soon as ever Lady Betty's away."

"It's me, Bauby," indignantly interrupted the little belle.

"It's you? Bless me, Miss Katie, wha was to ken in the dark? Come in-by, like a guid bairn. Lady Anne's been wearying sair, and so has Lordie—but that cutty Mally!"

"She canna hear ye—never heed her. Bauby, is the lady in the west room?"

"Na—nae fears of her; she's in her bed—the best place for her," said Bauby, who by no means admired the Lady Erskine. "And here's me, that might have been Lady Colville's ain woman, serving an unthankfu' mistress, that doesna ken folk's value; but I did it a' for you, bairns—a' for Lady Anne and you, Katie Stewart—or I wouldna have bidden a day at Kellie, and my ain guid mistress away."

"But didna Lady Betty ask ye, Bauby?"

"Ay, she asked me; but I didna behove to do it, for a' that unless I had likit; and weel Lady Betty kent I didna like; but for the sake of Lady Anne and you"—And Bauby lifted her apron to her eyes—"Lady Janet away, and Lady Betty away, and no a body loot to do their ain pleasure in a' the house. Here's me, stayed for nae ither reason but to mind her, and I'm no to be Lady Anne's maid after a'!"

"Eh, Bauby!"

"It's as sure as I'm living; and Lady Anne's that quiet a thing hersel, that aye never kens whether she wants aye or no; and she hasna the spunk to say right out that she'll hae naebody but me!"

"But she has though," said Katie Stewart; "yes she has—or if she hasna, I'll make her, Bauby."

"Weel, dinna get up wi' that bit passion of yours. Ye're a guid bairn—ye make folk do what you like, Miss Katie; but gang away up the stair now, and ye'll get milk sowens to your supper, and I'll serve ye in the west room mysel."

Eagerly Katie sprang up stairs, and went bounding along the dark gallery, full of her commission, and determined that Bauby Rodger, and none but she, let Lady

Erskine struggle as she would, should be Lady Anne's maid.

Little Lord Erskine (whose name of Lordie had its origin in Bauby's exclamation, uttered when she carried him up the great staircase on his arrival at Kellie, that he was a wee wee Lordie; without doubt) sat again on the low chair in front of the fire in the west room. The seat was so large, that as the child leaned back on it, his small feet in the silver-buckled shoes were just on a level with the edge of the chair. By his side, in a corner, sat the quiet Lady Anne, vainly trying to reduce his tone, and preserve her hair and dress from his hands; but Lordie set himself firmly on his seat, and tugged at her lace ruffles, and threatened instant destruction to the hair, which the tall full-grown girl already began to have combed up into a tower, as mature people wore it at the time. A faint remonstrance now and then was all that Lady Anne could utter: the young gentleman kept up the conversation himself.

"What way is Katie Stewart staying so long? What way do you let her stay, Aunt Anne? Mamma wouldna let her; and I want Katie Stewart—I dinna like you—I want Katie Stewart!"

"And you've gotten Katie Stewart, Lordie," exclaimed Katie, out of breath, as she laid her hands on his shoulders, and shook him slightly; "but I couldna be so good to you as Lady Anne is; for if I was Lady Anne, I would lick you."

"Naebody daur lick me—for I'll be the Earl of Kellie," said Lordie.

"You're only a little bairn," said Katie Stewart.

"Ay, but he will be the Earl of Kellie, Katie," said Lady Anne, drawing herself up with a little family pride. "Lordie will be the sixth Earl, and the chief of the house."

"But if he's no a good bairn, he'll be an ill man," said Katie meditatively, leaning upon the back of the chair, and looking down upon the spoiled child; "and a' the grand gentlemen in books are grand in their manners, and aye speak low, and bow; and the Master of Colville did that when Lady Betty was married, and so did the English gentleman; but Lordie aye speaks as loud, and makes as muckle noise, as Robert Tosh's bairns in Arncreoch."

"You forget who you're speaking to, Katie Stewart," said Lady Anne.

Katie was flushed with her walk, and

her hooded mantle hung half off her little handsome figure, as she bent her head over Lordie's chair, with her face bright, animated, and full of expression; but withdrawn in the corner sat the pale Lady Anne, her tall thin figure drawn up, and her homely features looking less amiable than ordinary, through the veil of this unusual pride. Brightly the firelight sparkled in Katie's sunny hair and shining eyes, but left in the shadow, cold and pale, the colorless face of her young patroness.

Katie looked up, as children do when they can not understand that you mean to reprove them—with a half wondering smile; a check of any kind was so unusual to her. Lady Anne's face was averted, and the little favorite began to comprehend that she had offended her. But Katie did not flinch—she fixed her eyes full on the face of her noble friend.

"Lady Anne! Bauby Rodgers says she's no to be your maid though she staid at Kellie for naething else but because she wanted to serve you; but the Lady winna let her, unless you take it up, and say it yoursel."

Slowly Lady Anne's head turned—slowly her eyelids rose to meet the bright kindly gaze fixed upon her, and her pride melted like mist.

"I never meant to be angry, Katie," said the penitent.

"But will ye speak to the Lady about Bauby, Lady Anne? For Bauby will leave the Castle, if she's no to serve you."

"I never thought Bauby cared for me: they're all like Lordie," said Lady Anne. "Lordie says he wants you, Katie—it's never me: they all want Katie Stewart."

"No me," cried little Katie, sliding down to the carpet at her friend's feet. "Whiles I would like no to be aye with mysel, but I could aye be with you—if you wanted me, Lady Anne."

The good Lady Anne! She laid her hand caressingly on Katie's pretty head, and smoothed the hair in which the light shone as in gold; for Lady Anne did not require so much as Isabell Stewart: she was content with the kindness of this little simple heart.

CHAPTER VII.

"I WOULDNA say but it may be dark before we're hame, Isabell," said Mrs. Stewart. "I ha'ena been in Colinsburgh mysel,

ye see, this year; and your faither has twa three odd things to look after; and Jist she'll be in some fuillishness before we get within sight of biggit land; but I'll nae Merran be back by six or seven, and nae no be very late oursel."

The little house-mother stood at the door, equipped for her journey to the market-town of Colinsburgh, which was three or four miles off. The day was a cold November one, and there were rare mists about the sky, prophesying veritable rain; but it was the day of the yearly market, and scarcely "an evening pour," could have kept back Janet. Her bright and picturesque looked Mrs. Stewart's comfortable warm dress. There was of thick linsey-woolsey—the warp wool—the warp white linen—every one of which had been spun on these wheels, big and little, in the family. As usual, the gown was open, it displayed an under petticoat of the material, which gave as much bulk as distance to the little woman's skirts. It had been a modern belle. But the fashions of that period were short enough to be visible a pair of neat feet clothed in woolen stockings and silver-buckled heeled shoes. A black velvet hood, and closely encircling her comely face, covering all but the edge of the snow-white lace which bordered her cap, and a pair of bright crimson, completed her dress. Her Sabbath day's dress, and Mrs. Stewart felt that it was handsome, and became her.

Janet and Merran had gone to John, with the broad bonnet of black which, as an elder, and moreover as a man of substance making pretensions to fashion, he wore on Sabbaths and festivals, stood at the door giving directions to his man, and waiting for his wife. Mrs. Stewart's door slightly ajar as she went away, she was bethinking her when she was half-way down the garden path, suddenly stepped back on a broad flat stone which lay before the door, and looked in to say a parting word to her daughter.

"Isabell! keep the door shut mysel. Let in nae gangrel folk; and see if naeboddy standing here hawering when your faither and me come hame."

So saying, and this time peremptorily closing the door after her, Mrs. Stewart joined her husband, and they went in.

The fire is made up—the house is clean as Merran's hands could make it.

a dim glimmer on the opposite wall
 as you the little dark complexioned
 or, at which Merran has just equipped
 self for the fair. The window at the
 end of the apartment, with the clean,
 -scoured deal-table before it, and a
 len chair standing primly on either
 looks cold and remote, and like an
 apartment; while the arrangements
 e rest of the kitchen give you the im-
 ion that every body is out, and that
 house is vacant. A great piece of
 calculated to burn till they all come
 , and only surrounded with a border
 d, fills the grate; and the cat winks
 ose to the lowest bar, that you see
 can be no great heat on the hearth.
 glistening doors of the oak aumrie
 closed—every stool, every chair, is in
 oper place; and only one sound dis-
 the surrounding silence without or
 n.

low, humming, musical sound—at
 nt somewhat slow and languid—the
hurr of the wheel at which Isabell
 drawing the fine yarn through her
 , and with her slight figure swaying
 urd now and then a little, as she
 the wheel with her foot. There is
 little color, very little light in her
 as she droops it, with a melancholy
 , over her graceful work. You can
 n, at first, that there is any thing
 ; at all in the apartment, only by
 oft lulling sound of the wheel; and
 e knows the pain in her heart only
 e murmur it sends—a low, inarticu-
 ry, which rather expresses, than com-
 s of the pang within—sighing through
 r thoughts.

ey have left her alone—she is alone
 the world, this poor Isabell. They
 no intention of neglect—no wish to
 l or slight her; but they think she
 l claim pleasures for herself—should
 take consideration like Janet, or
 at the lack of it. But the shy
 l can do none of these. She has
 to think herself of so little account,
 f she had stretched out her hand to
 e some envied gift, and any other
 ant did but appear, she would shrink
 and lose it. They think she does
 re for the usual pleasures of youth—
 an not understand how she should
 and yet hold back with that shy re-
 continually. So they leave her alone,
 hink it is her choice, and are not
 ned about the sadness which they

do not comprehend; and Isabell, feeling
 like old Matthew—she was no poet, or she
 might have said these touching words,
 long before Wordsworth said them—

“Many love me, yet by none
 Am I enough beloved”—

remains alone continually, and bears it as
 she may.

At present there is a quiet, sad wonder
 in this veiled and secret heart of hers.
 She can not tell how it is that she has
 been put back from the warm tide of life,
 and made a lay figure in the scene where
 every other one has some part to play.
 She thinks—and as she thinks, the tears
 gather slowly into her eyes—that she
 herself, left here alone, is as lovable as
 the loud Janet, now gayly on her way to
 the town. It is not either vanity or envy
 which prompts these thoughts; nor do
 they utter the weak sighs of self-pity:
 only a painful consciousness that she *has*
 the qualities which, in ordinary cases, pro-
 duce affection and regard, makes Isabell's
 heart heavy within her. She wants some-
 thing—some strange, mysterious faculty
 of being loved, which others have; and
 there is a yearning in her, which will not
 be persuaded into content.

And so, as she sits and spins, the after-
 noon wears on. Now and then a frag-
 ment of some plaintive song steals over
 her lip, half said, half sung; for the rest,
 Isabell sits motionless and silent, while the
 yarn grows on the pirn, and the wheel
 hums softly under her hand. But the
 room begins to brighten as the gray sky
 grows darker without, for the mass of coal
 has reddened, and sends off flashes of
 cheery light, which glimmer in Merran's
 little glass on the wall, and in the glisten-
 ing aumrie doors; and unconsciously Isa-
 bell moves her seat into the brighter circle
 which the happy fire enlightens, and the
 warm glow casts a ruddy shadow on her
 cheek, and the wheel hums with a quicker
 sound while darker and darker, toward
 the evening grows the eastern sky, and
 even in the west you can see little trace
 that the sun there has gone down into the
 sea.

She has paused for a moment in her
 work and the wheel ceases to hum. What
 sound is that, which seems to wander
 about the house—now nearer, now more
 distant? “The East Neuk of Fife” very
 certainly, whistled by some one whose
 whistling powers are by no means inco-
 siderable; and suddenly Isabell's fingers

fall again on the wheel, and it almost shrieks under her touch as it flies round and round.

A shadow on the further window! A head bending under the great boughs of the apple-tree to look in; and now, the whistling suddenly ceases, and a footstep begins to make itself audible, hastily approaching; and over the quick song of her wheel, and over this other sound without, Isabell hears the beating of her heart.

Lift the latch, neighbor; there are no envious keys or bolts to bar the entrance to this peaceful house; and now it is well, with natural delicacy, to leave the door a little ajar, so that sometimes the voice of the man at the mill may assure the young dweller at home that some one is very close at hand. Pleasantly now the sounds blend and mingle in this place, which was so still an hour ago; the burn without, ringing soft silvery bells into the night; the mill-wheel rustling, not too swiftly; the spinning-wheel adding its lady's voice; and on the threshold, the hasty foot—the eager, shy hand upon the latch of the opened door.

Just within the firelight now stands Philip Landale, and again his hands are busy with his riding-whip, and his eyes cast down upon it, as he says those tremulous usual words of greeting—*usual* words; but they might be Arabic for any thing either of the two know of them.

But by-and-by Philip Landale lays down his whip, and strangely hums the wheel of Isabell—now violent and swift—now low and trembling, like a breeze at night in spring—and now altogether it has ceased.

Ceased; and there is no sound in the apartment but the words of one hurried voice—the beating of two loud hearts. The firelight flickers on Isabell's cheek, which of itself now, dim as it was before, could make the darkness radiant, and her idle arm leans on the wheel, so that its support shakes under it; and the whip has fallen from the hand of young Kilbrachmont, as he stands before her, speaking those wonderful words.

The first—the best—the most dear;—there is one in the world, then, who thinks her so; and the tears fall heavy from her eyes upon her leaning arm, and her heart is sick for very joy.

Is it true? Look up again, and hear it; and the darkness passes out of your eyes, Isabell, and you begin to trust in the

tenderness of others. Thus feels one whom you doubted—and now your heart grows brave in its new warmth; you can trust all the world—and yourself.

The darkness grows, but they do not see it. The mill-wheel rises, the burn sings to itself in the air, and loudly now whistles the miller, as he stands at the mill door, looking over the Colinsburgh road, in the hope of seeing the fitting lanterning voice or step to warn him of his master's return. But no sound in the listening ears of Robert Maitland—sound—not even those near and distant ones—disturbs the blessedness with

CHAPTER VIII.

"LEDDY KILBRACHMONT! What a my man, she might have done more muckle waur; but I seena very waur she could have bettered herself in wiselike, gallant-looking lad in decent lairdship—another thing in an ed auld man."

"Weel, wife," said John Stewart, fully scratching his head, "weel, I'm thing against it in iteel; but we'll see what I'm to say to the Beelye."

"Ay, John, that will I," said the house-mother. "Tell him to take the bairn out of its cradle, pair weel, and ask himself what he has to do with a young wife—a young wife! and a lass like our Isabell! Man, John, I wi' that muckle body o' yours should have sae little heart! No, der ye need muckle coats and gars, ye, you men! for ne'er a spark in the hearts of ye, to keep ye warm in."

"Weel, weel, Isabell; the mair ye should gie me a guid dram to keep ye chill out," said the miller; "and I'm mair ye were airt and pair, and mair of the Beelye's bairn deil braw family than ever I did; but your way—ye put a' the blame on me, is blame, on me."

"Haud your peace, guidman Stewart. "Whiles I am drawing your reasonings against my ain mind, as happens to folk owre easy in the per, whether they will or no—I'm that; but nae man can say I'm

to any thing that would have broken heart of a bairn of mine. Take your s, and gang away with your worldly ghts to your worldly business, John art; if it wasna for you, I'm sure ne'er ough of pelf would enter *my* head." Eh, guidwife!" It was all that the r's astonishment could utter. He was down. With humility he took the , and softly setting his glass on the , went out like a lamb, to the mill.

Buddy Kilbrachmont! and Janet, the it gillpie, taking up with a common " said Mrs. Stewart, unconsciously ng aside the pretty wheel, the offer- the "wright" in Arncrooch. "Weel, what maun I do? If Isabell gangs to her ain house, and Janet—Janet's l worker—far mair use about a house urs than such a genty thing as Bell net married, too—what's to come o' I'll hae to bring hame Katie frae astle."

Fuckle guid ye'll get of Katie, moth- aid Janet, who, just then coming in the garden, with an armful of cold, brilliant greens, had heard her moth- oloquy. "If ye yokit her to the like a powny, she wadna spin the or Isabell's providing in half-a-dozen ; and no a mortal turn besides could do in a house, if ye gied her a' the etween this and Kellie Law."

nd wha asked *your* counsel?" said solute sovereign of Kellie Mill. "If o sair trysted wi' my family, there was a woman: first, your father— uckle he kens about the rule o' a old; and syne you, ye taupie—as ell's providing was yet to spin! To aid she? and it lying safe in the oak up the stair, since ever Bell was a nout of a bairn. And yours too, ye dinna deserve it; ay, and little s as weel, as the bonnie grass on the le could have tellt ye twal year ago, it was white wi' yarn a' the simmer h, spun on a purpose-like wheel—a fit for a woman's wark—no a toy t bairn. Gae way wi' you and your s. I would just like to see, wi' a' psetting, any ane o' ye bring up a as creditable as your mother!"

st stole in to the table at the further v, and, without a word, began to e her greens, which were immedi- be added to the other contents of eat pot, which, suspended by the bubbled and boiled over the fire;

for the moods of the house-mother were pretty well known in her dominions, and no one dared to lift up the voice of rebel- lion.

After an interval of silence, Mrs. Stew- art proceeded to her own room, and in a short time reappeared, hooded and plaid- ed, testifying with those echoing steps of hers, to all concerned, that she had again put on her high-heeled gala shoes. Isabell was now in the kitchen, quietly going about her share of the household labor, and do- ing it with a subdued graceful gladness which touched the mother's heart.

"I'm gaun up to Kellie, Bell, my wo- man," said Mrs. Stewart. "I wouldna say but we may need Katie at hame; onyway, I'll gang up to the Castle, and see what they say about it. It's time she had a while at hame to learn something purpose-like, or it's my fear she'll be fit for naething but to hang on about Lady Anne; and nae bairn o' mine shall do that wi' my will. Ye'll set Merran to the muckle wheel, Isabell, as soon as she's in frae the field; and get that cuttie Janet to do some cred- itable work. If I catch her out o' the house when I come hame, it'll be the waur for hersel."

"So ye're aye biding on at the Castle, Bauby," said Mrs. Stewart, as, her long walk over, she rested in the housekeeper's room, and greeted, with a mixture of fam- ilarity and condescension, the powerful Bauby, who had so long been the faithful friend and attendant of little Katie Stew- art. "Ye're biding on? I thought you were sure to gang with Lady Betty; and vexed I was to think of ye gaun away that my bairn liket sae weel."

"I'll never lee, Mrs. Stewart," said Bauby, confidentially. "If it hadna just been Katie Stewart's sel, and a thought of Lady Anne, puir thing, left her lee lane in the house, I would as soon have gaen out to the May to live, as bidden still in Kellie Castle. But someway they have grippit my heart atween them—I couldna leave the bairns."

"Aweel, Bauby, it was kind in ye," said the miller's wife; "but I'm in no manner sure that I winna take Katie away."

"Take Katie away—eh, Mrs. Stew- art!" And Bauby lifted up her great hands in appeal.

"Ye see her sister Isabell is to be mar- ried soon," said the important mother, ris- ing and smoothing down her skirts. "And

now I'm rested, Bauby, I'll thank ye to take me to Lady Anne's room."

The fire burned brightly in the west room, glowing in the dark polished walls, and brightening with its warm flush the clouded daylight which shone through the high window. Again on her high chair, with her shoulders fixed, so that she can not stoop, Lady Anne sits at her embroidery frame, at some distance from the window, where the slanting light falls full upon her work, patiently and painfully working those dim roses into the canvas which already bears the blossoms of many a laborious hour. Poor Lady Anne! People, all her life, have been doing their duty to her—training her into propriety—into noiseless decorum and high-bred manners. She has read the *Spectator* to improve her mind—has worked embroidery because it was her duty; and sits resignedly in this steel fixture now, because she feels it a duty too—a duty to the world at large that Lady Anne Erskine should have no curve in her shoulders—no stoop in her tall aristocratic figure. But, in spite of all this, though they make her stiff, and pale, and silent, none of these cares have at all tarnished the gentle lustre of Lady Anne's good heart; for, to tell truth, embroidery, and prejudices, and steel-collars, though they cramp both body and mind a little, by no means have a bad effect—or, at least, by no means so bad an effect as people ascribe to them in these days—upon the heart; and there lived many a true lady then—lives many a true lady now—to whom devout thoughts have come in those dim hours, and fair fancies budded and blossomed in the silence. It was very true that Lady Anne sat there immovable, holding her head with conscientious firmness, as she had been trained to hold it, and moving her long fingers noiselessly as her needle went out and in through the canvas before her—very true that she thought she was doing her duty, and accomplishing her natural lot; but not any less true, notwithstanding, that the heart which beat softly against her breast was pure and gentle as the summer air, and, like it, touched into quiet brightness by the light from heaven.

Near her, carelessly bending forward from a lower chair, and leaning her whole weight on another embroidery frame, sits Katie Stewart, laboring with a hundred wiles to draw Lady Anne's attention from her work. One of little Katie's round

white shoulders is gleaming out of her dress, and she is not in the least embarrassed her head down between her arms, and pushes back the rich golden hair, which falls in shining, half-curved tresses over her fingers, and laughs, and pouts, as she looks up at Lady Anne; but Lady Anne answers quietly, and goes on with her work—for it is right and needful to do many hours, and Lady Anne is determined to do her duty.

But not so Katie Stewart: her hands lie idle on the canvas; her head leans over her arm, getting soiled and tired. Lady Anne blushes to remember that it is since her wayward favorite that that group of flowers.

For Katie feels no duty—no responsibility in the matter; and having wasted a whole dreary hour, and accomplished a whole leaf, inclines to be idle a while, would fain make her companion idle too. But the conscientious Lady Anne shakes her head, and labors on; so Katie sits still further over the frame, and more entirely disregarding her countenance and deportment, tosses back the long flowing curls again, and with her cheeks flushed and her fingers keeping back the hair from her brow, lifts up her voice and sings.

"Corn rigs and barley rigs,
Corn rigs are bonnie."

Sweet, clear, and full is little Katie's voice, and she leans forward, with her eyes dwelling kindly on Lady Anne's face, while, with affectionate pleasure, Lady Anne sits still, and works away—the sweet child's voice, in which there is still scarcely a graver modulation, of the coming woman, echoing the generous gentle heart which scarcely in its life has had a selfish thought to disrupt the simple beautiful administration of its unenvious love.

"Katie, ye little cuttie!" exclaims the horror-stricken mother, looking at the door.

Katie started; but it was a privileged boldness to look up into her mother's face, as she finished the last verse of her song.

"Eh, Lady Anne, what can you say?" said Mrs. Stewart, coming forward with indignant energetic haste; "will your ladyship say to that monkey? Katie, have I no advice to give ye to get the manners of a servant at your peril, however grand the

ye saw; but nevertheless, to gie honor where honor is due, as it's commanded. I think shame to look ye in the face, Lady Anne, after hearing a bairn of mine use such a freedom."

"But you have no need, Mrs. Stewart," said Lady Anne, "for Katie is at home."

There was the slightest possible tone of authority in the words, gentle as they were; and Mrs. Stewart felt herself put down.

"Weel, your ladyship kens best; but I came to speak about Katie, Lady Anne. I'm thinking I'll need to bring her hame."

Mrs. Stewart had her revenge. Lady Anne's quiet face grew red and troubled, and she struggled to loose herself from her bondage, and turn round to face her threatening visitor.

"To take Katie home?—away from me? Oh, Mrs. Stewart, dinna!" said Lady Anne, forgetting that she was no longer a child.

"Ye see, my lady, our Isabell is to be married. The young man is Philip Landale of Kilbrachmont. Ye may have heard tell of him even in the Castle; a lad with a guid house and plenty substance to take hame a wife to; and a guid wife he'll get to them, though maybe I shoudna say it. And so you see, Lady Anne, I'll be left with only Janet at hame."

"But, Mrs. Stewart, Katie has not been accustomed to it; she could not do you any good," said the eager, injudicious Lady Anne.

"The very words, my lady—the very thing I said to our guidman and the bairns at hame. 'It's time,' says I, 'that Katie was learnin' something fit for her natural place and lot. What kind of a wife will she ever make to a puir man, coming straight out of Kellie Castle, and Lady Anne's very cha'mer?' No that I'm meaning it's needful that she should get a puir man, Lady Anne; but a bien man in the parish is no like ane of your grand lords and earls; and if Katie does as weel as her mother before her, she'll hae a better portion than she deserves."

Indignantly Katie tossed her curls from her forehead, bent her little flushed face over the frame, and began to ply her needle as if for a wager.

"But, Mrs. Stewart," urged Lady Anne, "Katie's birthday is not until May, and she's only fifteen then. Never mind the man—there's plenty time; but as long as we're at Kellie, and not far

away from you, Mrs. Stewart, why should not Katie live all her life with me?"

Katie glanced up archly, saucily, but said nothing.

"It woudna be right, my lady. In the first place, you'll no be aye at Kellie; you'll get folk you'll like better than Katie Stewart; and Katie must depend on naeboddy's will and pleasure. I'll have it said of nae bairn of mine that she sorned on a stranger. Na, she must come hame."

Lady Anne's eyes filled with tears. The little proud belligerent mother stood triumphant and imperious before the fire. The petulant willful favorite pouted over her frame; and Lady Anne looked from one to the other with overflowing eyes.

"My sister Betty's away, and my sister Janet's away," said Anne Erakine, sadly; "I've nobody but Katie now. If you take Katie away, Mrs. Stewart, I'll break my heart."

Little Katie put away her frame without saying a word, and coming silently to the side of the high chair, knelt down, and looked earnestly into Lady Anne's drooping face. There was some wonder in the look—a little awe—and then she laid down her soft cheek upon that hand of Lady Anne's, on which already some tears had fallen, and taking the other hand into her own, continued to look up with a strange, grave, sudden apprehension of the love which had been lavished on her so long. Anne Erakine's tears fell softly on the earnest uplooking face, and Mrs. Stewart's heart was melted.

"Weel, Lady Anne, it's no my nature to do a hard thing to any body. Keep the cuttie; I'll no seek her as lang as I can do without her. I gie you my word."

CHAPTER IX.

THE west room is in no respect changed, though three years have passed since we saw it last. In the middle of the room stands a great open chest, already half full of carefully packed dresses. This square flat parcel, sewed up in a linen cover, which Katie Stewart holds in her arms as if she could with all her heart throw it out of the window, instead of depositing it reverently in the chest, is Lady Anne's embroidery; and Lady Anne herself is collecting stray silks and needle-

books into a great satin bag. They are preparing for a journey.

Lady Anne Erskine is twenty—very tall, very erect, and with a most exceptional carriage. From her placid quiet brow the hair is combed up, leaving not so much as one curl to shelter or shadow a cheek which is very soft and pale indeed, but which no one could call beautiful, or even comely. On her thin arms she wears long black gloves which do not quite reach the elbow, but leave a part of the arm visible under the lace ruffles which terminate her sleeves; and her dress is of dark rustling silk, rich and heavy, though not so spotless and youthful as it once was. Her little apron is black, and frilled with lace; and from its pocket peeps the corner of a bright silken huswife; for Lady Anne is no less industrious now than when she was a girl.

Ah, saucy Katie Stewart! Eighteen years old, and still no change in you! No gloves on the round arms which clasp that covered-up embroidery—no huswife, but a printed broadsheet ballad, the floating light literature of the place and time, in the pocket of *your* apron—no propriety in your free rebel shoulders. And people say there is not such another pair of merry eyes in sight of Kellie Law.

The golden hair is imprisoned now, but not so closely as Lady Anne's, for some little curls steal lovingly down at the side, and the fashion of combing it up clears the open white forehead, which, in itself, is not very high, but just in proportion to the other features of the face. Only a little taller is the round active figure—a very little. No one is quite sensible, indeed, that Katie has made any advance in stature at all, except herself; and even herself scarcely hopes, now in the maturity of eighteen to attain another half inch.

But the little girlish spirit has been growing in those quiet years. It was Spring with her, when Katie saw the tears of Anne Erskine for her threatened removal, and her eyes were opened then in some degree to an appreciation of her beautiful lot. How it was that people loved her, followed her with watchful, solicitous affection—*her*, simple little Katie Stewart—the consciousness brought a strange thrill into her heart. One may grow vain with much admiration, but much love teaches humility. She wondered at it in her secret heart—smiled over it with tears—and it softened and

curbed her, indulged and willful though she was.

But all this time, in supreme contentment Katie held the rural homage which began to be paid to her. Simple and plain as a child in Kellie, Katie at home was a young farmer, or sailor, or prosperous country tradesman, or all of them together, as happened not unfrequently, hung about the fire in the Anstruther Manse to which the family had now retired, watching for opportunities to recruit themselves, was as stately and dignified as any Lady Erskine of them all. For her had made up her mind. Still, "a good gentleman," handsome, courtly, and accomplished, with titles and honors won and birth, wandered about, a gleaming splendid shadow, through the castle or built every day. To gain some rich noble wooer, of whatever kind obtainable, was by no means Katie's ambition. It was a superb imagination, which walked by her side in her dreams, usually clothed with the grandeur which was his due; for Katie's mind was very greatly developed yet—her powers—and the purple of nobility rank draped her grand figure with simplicity—a guileless ideal.

"Is Lady Betty's house a grand place, Lady Anne?" asked Katie, as she passed the embroidery in the chest.

"It's in the High-street," said Lady Anne, with some pride; "not far from the Parliament House, Katie; but not like Kellie, you know; and you have never been in a town, may think it close, and not like a noble house to be in a street; but the High-street and the Canongate are grand streets; and the house is very fine too—only Betty is absent."

"Is Lord Colville no at home, Lady Anne?" asked Katie.

"Lord Colville's at the sea—he's absent at the sea—and it's dreary for Betty to be left alone; but when she sees us Katie she'll think she's at Kellie again."

"And would she be glad to think that I wonder?" said Katie, half under her breath.

But Lady Anne did not answer—the good lady was making no speculation at the moment about happiness in the abstract, and so did not properly appreciate the question of her little friend.

The sound of a loud step descending the stairs startled them. Onwards came thumping through the gallery.

breathless voice bore it company, singing after a very strange fashion. Voice and step were both undoubtedly Bauby Rodgers, and the gallery creaked under the one, and the song came forth in gasps from the other, making itself articulate in a stormy gust as she approached the door.

"Oh handsome Charlie Stuart!
Oh charming Charlie Stuart!
There's no a lad in a' the land
That's half as sweet as thou art!"

"Bauby!" exclaimed Lady Anne with dignity, as her giant handmaiden threw open the door—"Bauby, you have forgotten yourself. Is that a way to enter a room where I am?"

"Your pardon, my lady; I beg your pardon; I canna help it. Eh, Lady Anne! Eh, Miss Katie! 'Little wat ye wha's coming; prince and lord and a's coming.' There's ane in the court—ane frae the North, wi' the news of a' the victories!"

Lady Anne's face flushed a little. "Who is it?—what is it, Bauby?"

"It's the Prince just, blessin's on his bonnie face!—they say he's the gallantest gentleman that ever was seen—making a' the road frae the Hielands just as great conquish. The man says there's thousands o' the clans after him—a grand army, beginnin' wi' the regular sodgers in their uniform, and ending wi' the braw tartans—or ending wi' the clouds mair like, for what twa e'en could see the end of them marching, and them thousands aboon thousands; and white cockaids on ilka bonnet of them. Eh, my leddy! I could greet, I could dance, I could sing,

* An somebody were come again,
Then somebody maun cross the main,
And ilka man shall hae his ain,
Carle an the King come!"

"Hush, Bauby, hush," said Lady Anne, drawing herself up with a consciousness of indecorum; but her pale cheek flushed, and her face grew animated. She could not pretend to indifference.

"Ye had best get a sword and a gun, and a white cockade yoursel. You're big enough, Bauby," said the anti-Jacobite Katie; "for your grand Chevalier will need a' his friends yet. Maybe if you're no feared, but keep up with a' thae wild Hielandmen, he'll make you a knight, Bauby."

"Katie, you forget who's beside you," said Lady Anne.

"Oh! ne'er mind me, my lady; I'm used to argue wi' her; but if I did fecht

for the Chevalier—ay, ye may ca' him sae!—was it no your ain very sel, Katie Stewart, that tellt me, nae later than yestreen, that chivalry meant the auld grand knights that fought for the distressed lang syne? And if I *did* fecht for the Prince, what should ail me? And if it was the will of Providence to make me strong and muckle, and you bonnie and wee, whase blame was that? The Chevalier! Ay, and blessings on him!—for isna he just in the way of the auld chivalry—and isna he gaun to deliver the distressed?"

"The way the King did in the persecuting times—him that shot them down like beasts, because they liket the kirk," said Katie.

"Eh, ye little Whig! that I should say sae! But I have nae call to stand up for the auld kings—they've gaen to their place, and rendered their account; but this bonnie lad—for a bonnie lad he is, though he's born a prince, and will dee a great king, as it's my hope and desire—has nae blame of thae ill deeds. He's come for his ain kingdom, and justice, and the rights of the nation, 'and ilka man shall hae his ain.'"

"But wha's wronged, Bauby?" asked the unbeliever.

"Wha's wronged? Isna the nation wronged wi' a bit German duke pitten down in the big seat of our native king? Isna a'boddy wronged that has to suffer that? And isna he coming with his white cockade to set a' thing right again?"

"Bauby, you forget we're to leave Kellie at twelve," said Lady Anne, interrupting this conclusive logic, "and the things are not all ready. We'll hear the true news about the Prince in Edinburgh."

"We'll see him, bless him! for he's marching on Edinburgh, driving a' thae cowards before him like a wheen sheep," said Bauby, triumphantly. "I couldna keep the guid news to mysel, my lady; but now I maun awa."

And Bauby hastened from the room, letting her voice rise as she went through the gallery, enough to convey to Katie's ear her wish—

"To see guid corn upon the rigs,
And banishment to a' the Whigs."

After this interruption, the packing went on busily, and for a considerable time in silence. It was the memorable year of Scottish romance—the "forty-

five;" and there were few hearts on either side which could keep their usual pace of beating when the news of the wild invasion was told. But like all other times of great events and excitement, the ordinary platitudes of life ran on with wonderfully little change—ran on, and wove themselves about those marvels; so that this journey to Edinburgh, even in Lady Anne Erskine's eyes, at present bulked as largely, and looked as important, as the threatened revolution; and to little Katie Stewart, her new gown and mantle were greater events than the advent of the Chevalier.

"Are you no feared to go to Edinburgh, Lady Anne, and the Chevalier and a' his men coming?" asked Katie at length.

Katie's own eyes sparkled at the idea, for the excitement of being in danger was a more delightful thing than she had ever ventured to anticipate before.

"Afraid? He is the true Prince, whether he wins or fails," said Lady Anne; "and no lady need fear where a Stuart reigns. It's his right he comes for. I pray Heaven give the Prince his right."

Katie looked up with some astonishment. Very few things thus moved the placid Lady Anne.

"It would only be after many a man was killed," said Katie; "and if the King in London comes from Germany, this Chevalier comes from France; and his forefathers were ill men, Lady Anne."

"Katie Stewart," said Lady Anne, hastily, "it's ignorance you're speaking. I will not hear it. I'll hear nothing said against the right. The Prince comes of the true royal blood. He is the son of many good kings; and if they were not all good, that is not his fault. My fathers served his. I will hear nothing said against the Prince's right."

Little Katie looked up wonderingly into her friend's face, and then turned away to conclude her packing. But, quite unconvinced as she was of the claims and rights of the royal adventurer, his young opponent said no more about Prince Charles.

CHAPTER X.

CORN-FIELDS lie under the low green hills, here bending their golden load under the busy reaper's hand, there shorn and

naked, with the gathered sheaves in heaps where yesterday they grew. Pleasant sounds are in the clear rich autumn harvest voices, harvest mirth, purified by a little distance from all its coarseness, and through the open cottage doors you see the eldest child, matronly and important in one house, idling with a sense of guilt in the other, who has been left at home in charge, that all elder and other people might get to the field. Pleasant excitement and haste touch you with a contagious cheer and activity as you pass. Here hath our bountiful mother been rendering riches out of her full breast more; here, under those broad, bright smiling heavens, the rain and the sun, which God sends upon the just and the unjust, have day by day cherished the seed, and brought it forth in black harvest ear; and now there is a thanksgiving to all the air, and quickened steps and cheerful laboring proclaim the unconscious sentiment which animates the whole. Bright, prosperous, wealthy autumn days, when the reaper has no less share than his master, and the whole world is enriched with the universal gain.

And now the Firth comes flashing in sight, making the whole horizon a bold line, with one white sail, far off, floating on it like a cloud. Heavily, as if it were hung the water, that dark hill presents a bold outline on the mingled glory of sky and sea; and under its shadow lie quiet houses, musing on the beach, so still, that you could fancy them only lingering, meditating there. But little meditation is under those humble roofs, for the ships of Largo are out on the Firth, as your red sails tell you, straying forth at the wide mouth of the bay; and the women at home are weaving nets, and selling fish, and have time for any thing but meditation.

But now Largo Law is left behind, and there is a grand scene beyond. The skies are clear and distinct as skies only in autumn; and yonder couches a lion, who watches our fair Edinburgh night and day; and there she stands herself, his Una, with her grey wimple on her head, and her feet on the sands of the vassal sea. Queenlike attendants there are: they are almost her sole glory, for her crown is taken from her head, and her new life of genius has scarcely begun, but none can part the forlorn queen from her two faithful henchmen, the Firth and the hill.

There are few other passengers to cross the ferry with our little party; for Lady Anne has only one man-servant for escort and protection to herself, Katie Stewart, and their formidable maid. In those days people were easily satisfied with traveling accommodation. The ferry-boat was a little dingy sloop, lifting up a huge picturesque red sail to catch the soft wind, which carried them along only very slowly; but Katie Stewart leaned over its grim bulwark, watching the water—so calm, that it seemed to have consistence and shape as the slow keel cut it asunder—softly gliding past the little vessel's side, and believed she had never been so happy.

It was night when they reached Edinburgh, under the care of a little band of Lady Colville's servants and hangers-on—all the male force the careful Lady Betty could muster—who had been waiting for them at the water-side. The Chevalier's forces were rapidly approaching the city, and Katie Stewart's heart thrilled with a fear which had more delight in it than any previous joy, as slowly in their heavy cumbrous carriage, with their little body of adherents, they moved along through the gloom and rustling sounds of the beautiful night. In danger! not unlike the errant ladies of the old time and approaching to the grand centre of romance and song—the Edinburgh of dreams.

Lady Colville's house was in the High-street, opposite the old Cross of Edinburgh; and, with various very audible self-congratulations on the part of their attendants, the visitors entered the narrow dark gateway, and arrived in the paved court within. It was not very large this court; and, illuminated by the fitful light of a torch, which just showed the massy walls frowning down, with all kinds of projections on every side, the dwelling-place of Lady Colville did not look at all unlike one of the mysterious houses of ancient story. Here were twin windows, set in a richly-ornamented gable, sending out gleams of fierce reflection as the light flashed into their small dark panes; and yonder, tier above tier, the great mansion closes up darkly to the sky, which fits the deep well of this court like a roof glowing with its "little lot of stars." Katie had time to observe it all while the good maternal Lady Betty welcomed her young sister at the door. Very dark, high, narrow was the entrance, more like a cleft in

great black rocks, admitting to some secret cavern, than a passage between builded walls; and the dark masses of shadow which lay in those deep corners, and the elfin torchlight throwing wild gleams here and there over the heavy walls, and flashing back from unseen windows, every where made a strange picturesque scene—relieved as it was by the clear, faint stars above, and the warm light from the opened door.

But it was not at that time the most peaceful of residences, this house of Lady Colville's; for in a day or two Katie began to start in her high chamber at the long boom of the Castle guns; and in these balmy lightsome nights, excited crowds paced up and down, from the Canongate and the Lawnmarket, and gathered in groups about the Cross, discussing the hundred rumors to which the crisis gave birth. At all times this Edinburgh crowd does dearly love to gather like waves in the great street of the old city, and amuse itself with an excitement when the times permit. As they sweep along—knots of old men, slowly deliberating—clusters of young ones, quickening their pace as their conversation and thoughts intensify—all in motion, continually coming and going, the wide street never sufficiently thronged to prevent their passage, but enough so to secure all the animation of a crowd; and women looking on only from the "close mouths" and outer stairs, spectators merely, not actors in the ferment which growls too deeply for them to join—the scene is always interesting, always exciting to a stranger; it loses somehow the natural meanness of a vulgar mob, and you see something historical, which quickens your pulse, and makes your blood warm, in the angry crowd of the High-street, if it be only some frolic of soldiers from the Castle which has roused its wrath.

Out, little Katie! out on the round balcony of that high oriel window—something approaches which eyes of noble ladies around you brighten to see. On the other balcony below this, Lady Anne, with a white ribbon on her breast, leans over the carved balustrade, eagerly looking out for its coming, with a flushed and animated face, to which enthusiasm gives a certain charm. Even now in her excitement she has time to look up, time to smile—though she is almost too anxious to smile—and wave her fluttering handkerchief to you above there, Katie Stewart, to quicken

your zeal withal. But there, little stubborn Whig, unmoved except by curiosity, and with not a morsel of white ribbon about her whole person, and her handkerchief thrown away into the inner room, lest she should be tempted to wave it, stands the little Hanoverian Katie, firmly planting her feet upon the window-sill, and leaning on the great shoulder of Bauby Rodger, who thrusts her forward from behind. Bauby is standing on a stool within the room, her immense person looming through the oppressed window, and one of her mighty hands, with a handkerchief nearly as large as the main-sail of a sloop, squeezed up within it like a ball, ready to be thrown loose to the winds when he comes, grasping, like Lady Anne, the rail of the balustrade.

There is a brilliant sky overhead, and all the way along, until the street loses itself in its downward slope to the palace, those high-crested coroneted windows are crowded with the noble ladies of Scotland. Below, the crowd thickens every moment—a murmuring, moving mass, with many minds within it like Katie Stewart's, hostile, as fears for future and remembrance of past injuries can make them, to the hero of the day. And banners float in the air, which high above there is misty with the palpable gold of this exceeding sunshine; and distant music steals along the street, and far-off echoed cheers tell that he is coming—he is coming! Pretender—Prince—Knight-errant—the last of a doomed and hapless race.

Within the little boudoir on the lower story, which this oriel window lights, Lady Colville sits in a great elbow-chair apart, where she can see the pageant without, and not herself be seen; for Lady Betty wisely remembers that, though the daughter of a Jacobite earl, she is no less the wife of a Whig lord, whose flag floats over the broad sea far away, in the name of King George. Upon her rich stomacher you can scarcely discern the modest white ribbon which, like an innocent ornament, conceals itself under the folds of lace; but the ribbon, nevertheless, is there; and ladies in no such neutral position as hers—offshoots of the attainted house of Mar, and other gentle cousins, crowd her other windows, though no one has seen herself on the watch to hail the Chevalier.

And now he comes! Ah! fair, high,

royal face, in whose beauty lurks this look, like the doubtful marsh, under its mossy, brilliant verdure—this look of wandering, imbecile expression, like the passing shadow of an idiot's face over the face of a manful youth. Only at times you catch it as he passes gracefully along, bowing like a prince to those enthusiastic subjects at the windows, to those not quite so enthusiastic in the street below. A moment, and all eyes are on him; and now the cheer passes on—on—and the crowd follows in a stream, and the spectators reluctantly stray in from the window—the Prince has past.

But Lady Anne still bends over the balustrade, her strained eyes wand'ring after him, herself unconscious of the gentle call with which Lady Betty tries to rouse her as she leaves the little room. Quiet Anne Erskine has had no recreation in her youth—shall have none in the present still life which, day by day, comes to her out of the changeful skies. Her affections for sisters, brethren, friends, to be her portion, and her heart has never craved another; but for this moment a strange magic has roused her. With her strained spirit a heroic ode is ringing; no one hears the gradual swelling of stricken chords; no one knows how the excited heart beats to their strange melody, but give her a poet's utterance that will resolve that inarticulate cadence, to which her very hand beats time, into the verse for which unconsciously she struggles. You should have a song to rouse a nation. Such songs there are; that terrible *Veil de la mort*, for instance—wrung out of a moved heart in its highest climax of agony—the wild essence and inspiration of a mind which was not, by nature, a poet's.

"Lady Anne! Lady Anne! That's a' past now," said Katie Stewart.

Lady Anne's hand fell passively for its support; her head drooped against the breast; and over her pale cheek came a sudden burst of tears. Quickly she stepped down from the balcony, and throwing herself into Lady Betty's chair, covered her face and wept.

"He's no an ill man—I think it's no an ill man," said little Katie in a doubtful meditation. "I wish Prince Charles were safe at hame; for what will be here?"

CHAPTER XI.

IN Lady Colville's great drawing-room a gay party had assembled. It was very shortly after the Prestonpans victory, and the invading party were flushed with high hopes. Something of the ancient romance softened and refined the very manners of the time. By a sudden revulsion those high-spirited noble people had leaped forth from the prosaic modern life to the glowing, brilliant, eventful days of old—as great a change almost as if the warlike barons and earls of their family galleries had stepped out into visible life again. Here is one young gallant, rich in lace and embroidery, describing to a knot of earnest, eager listeners the recent battle. But for this the youth had vegetated on his own acres, a slow, respectable squire—he is a knight now, errant on an enterprise as daring and adventurous as ever engaged a Sir Lancelot or Sir Tristram. The young life, indeed, hangs in the balance—the nation's warfare is involved; but the dangers which surround and hem them about only brighten those youthful eyes, and make their hearts beat the quicker. All things are possible—the impossible they behold before them a thing accomplished; and the magician exercises over them a power like witchcraft;—their whole thoughts turn upon him—their speech is full of Prince Charles.

Graver are the older people—the men who risk families, households, established rank—and whose mature minds can realize the full risk involved. Men attained in “the fifteen,” who remember how it went with them then—men whom trustful retainers follow, and on whose heads lies this vast responsibility of life and death. On some faces among them are dark immovable clouds—on some the desperate calmness of hearts strung to any or every loss; and few forget, even in those brief triumphant festivities, that their lives are in their hands.

In one of those deep window-seats, half hidden by the curtain, Katie Stewart sits at her embroidery frame. If she never worked with a will before, she does it now; for the little rural belle is fluttered and excited by the presence and unusual conversation of the brilliant company round her. The embroidery frame just suffices to mark that Katie is Katie, and not a noble Erskine, for Lady Anne has made it very difficult to recognize the distinction

by means of the dress. Katie's, it is true, is plainer than her friend's;—she has no jewels—wears no white rose; but as much pains have been bestowed on her toilet as on that of any lady in the room; and Lady Anne sits very near the window, lest Katie should think herself neglected. There is little fear—for here he stands, the grand gentleman, at Katie Stewart's side!

Deep in those massy walls is the recess of the window, and the window itself is not large, and has a frame of strong broad bars, such as might almost resist a siege. The seat is cushioned and draped with velvet, and the heavy crimson curtain throws a flush upon Katie's face. Quickly move the round arms, gloved with delicate black lace, which does not hide their whiteness; and, escaping from this cover, the little fingers wind themselves among those bright silks, now resting a moment on the canvas, as Katie lifts her eyes to listen to something not quite close at hand which strikes her ear—now impatiently beating on the frame as she droops her head, and can not choose but hear something very close at hand which touches her heart.

A grand gentleman!—Manlike and gallant the young comely face which, high up there, on the other side of those heavy crimson draperies, bends toward her with smiles and winning looks, and words low-spoken—brave the gay heart which beats under his rich uniform—noble the blood that warms it. A veritable Sir Alexander, not far from the noble house of Mar in descent, and near them in friendship; a brave, poor baronet, young, hopeful, and enthusiastic, already in eager joyous fancies beholding his Prince upon the British throne, himself on the way to fortune. At first only for a hasty moment, now and then, can he linger by Katie's window; but the moments grow longer and longer, and now he stands still beside her, silently watching this bud grow upon the canvas—silently following the motion of those hands. Little Katie dare not look up for the eyes that rest on her—eyes which are not bold either, but have a certain shyness in them; and as her eyelids droop over her flushed cheeks, she thinks of the hero of her dreams, and asks herself, with innocent wonder thrilling through her heart, if this is he?

The ladies talk beside her, as Katie can not talk; shrewdly, simply, within herself, she judges what they say—forms other

conclusions—pursues quite another style of reasoning—but says nothing; and Sir Alexander leans his high brow on the crimson curtain, and disregards them all for her.

Leaves them all to watch this bud—to establish a supervision, under which Katie at length begins to feel uneasy, over these idling hands of hers. Look him in the face, little Katie Stewart, and see if those are the eyes you saw in your dreams.

But just now she can not look him in the face. In a strange enchanted mist she reclines in her window-seat, and dallies with her work. Words float in upon her half-dreaming sense, fragments of conversation which she will remember at another time; attitudes, looks, of which she is scarcely aware now, but which will rise on her memory hereafter, when the remembered sunshine of those days begins to trace out the frescoes on the wall. But now the hours float away as the pageant passed through that crowded High-street yesterday. She is scarcely conscious of their progress as they go, but will gaze after them when they are gone.

"And you have no white rose?" said the young cavalier.

He speaks low. Strange that he should speak low, when among so many conversations other talkers have to raise their voices—low as Philip Landale used to speak to Isabell.

"No," said Katie.

He bends down further—speaks in a still more subdued tone; while Katie's fingers play with the silken thread, and she stoops over her frame so closely that he can not see her face.

"Is it possible that in Kellie one should have lived disloyal? But that is not the greatest marvel. To be young, and fair, and generous—is it not the same as to be a friend of the Prince? But your heart is with the white rose, though you do not wear it on your breast?"

"No." Look up, little Katie—up with honest eyes, that he may be convinced. "No; his forefathers were ill men; and many a man will die first, if Prince Charles be ever King."

"Katie, Katie!" said the warning voice of Lady Anne, who has caught the last words of this rebellious speech. And again the mist steals over her in her corner; and as the light wanes and passes away from the evening skies, she only dimly sees the bending figure beside her, only vaguely

receives into her dreaming mind the low words he says. It is all a dream—the beautiful dim hours depart—the brilliant groups disperse and go away; and, leaving out alone from that oriel window, Katie Stewart looks forth upon the night.

Now and then passes some late rider—now and then drowsily paces past a veteran of the City Guard. The sky is dark on this side, lying in deep shadow but the harvest moon throws its full light on the opposite pavement, and the scarce unfrequent figures move along, flooded with the silver radiance, which seems to take substance and tangibility from them, and to bear them along, floating, gliding, on the soft waters of the Firth bore the same across the ferry. But here comes a footstep of authority, echoing through the silent street—a rustling Highland kilt with a dark henchman, like a shadow, his hand; and that—that is that long ing figure looking up to the light in Lady Anne Erskine's window, as he winds his way downward to the Palace. Little Katie's heart—she had brought out here to still it—leaps again; but it is the same form which haunts her heart, and again the wonder thrills through her strangely, if thus she has come in sight of her fate.

Draw your silken mantle closer to you, Katie Stewart; put back the curls which this soft breath of night has on your cheek, and lean your brow upon your hand which leans upon the settee stone. Slowly he passes in the moonlight looking up at the light which may be yours—which is not yours, little watcher, in the gloom he can not see; let your foot wander after him, as now the full moon beams fill up the vacant space within a minute since his gallant figure stood before it is true; your sunny face shines before his eyes—your soft voice is speaking; ordinary words to that good simple heart of his; and strange delight is in the thought of wonder which moves you to ask yourself the question—Is this the hero?

But now the sleep of youth falls on you when your head touches the pillow simple Katie, no; when the hero comes you will not speculate—will not ask yourself questions; but now it vexes you that your first thoughts in the waking morning are not of this stranger, and neither have been in your dreams.

For dreams are perverse—honest—will not be persuaded into the service.

this wandering fancy. Spring up, Katie Stewart, thankfully out of those soft, deep, dreamless slumbers, into the glorious morning air, which fills the street between those lofty houses like some golden fluid in an antique well;—spring up joyously to the fresh lifetime of undiscovered hours which lie in this new day. Grieve not that only tardily, slowly, the remembrance of the last night's gallant returns to your untroubled mind; soon enough will come this fate of yours, which yet has neither darkened nor brightened your happy skies of youth. Up with your free thoughts, Katie, and bide your time!

A visitor of quite a different class appeared in Lady Colville's drawing-room that day. It was the Honorable Andrew, whose magnificent manners had awakened Katie's admiration at his brother's marriage. Not a youth, but a mature man, this Colville was heir to the lordship; for the good Lady Betty had no children; and while the elder brother spent his prime in the toils of his profession, fighting and enduring upon the sea, the younger indolently dwelt at home, acquiring, by right of a natural inclination toward the beautiful, the character of a refined and elegant patron of the arts. Such art as there was within his reach, he did patronize a little; but his love of the beautiful was by no means the elevating sentiment which we generally conclude it to be. He liked to have fine shapes and colors ministering to his gratification—liked to appropriate and collect around himself, his divinity, the delicate works of genius—liked to have the world observe how fine his eye was, and how correct his taste; and, lounging in his sister-in-law's drawing-room, surveyed the dark portraits on the walls, and the tall erect Lady Anne in the corner, with the same supercilious polished smile.

Lady Betty sits in a great chair, in a rich dress of black silk, with a lace cap over her tower of elaborate hair. She is just entering the autumnal years; placid, gentle, full of the sunshine of kindness has been her tranquil summer, and it has mellowed and brightened her very face. Less harsh than in her youth are those pale lines—softened, rounded by that kind hand of Time, which deals with her gently, she uses him so well.

The Honorable Andrew, with his keen eyes, does not fail to notice this, and now he begins to compliment his sister on her benign looks; but Lady Anne is not old

enough to be benign, and her movements become constrained and awkward—her voice harsh and unmanageable, in presence of the critic. He scans her pale face as if it were a picture—listens when she speaks like one who endures some uncouth sounds—is a Whig. Lady Anne could almost find it in her heart, gentle though that heart be, to hate this supercilious Andrew Colville.

Loop up this heavy drapery—Katie Stewart is not aware of any one looking at her. Her fingers, threaded through these curls, support her cheek—her shoulders are carelessly curved—her other ungloved arm leans upon the frame of her embroidery, and her graceful little head bends forward, looking out with absorbed unconscious eyes. Now there comes a wakening to the dreamy face, a start to the still figure. What is it? Only some one passing below, who lifts his bonnet from his bright young forehead, and bows as he passes. Perhaps the bow is for Lady Anne, faintly visible at another window. Lady Anne thinks so, and quietly returns it as a matter of course; but not so thinks Katie Stewart.

The Honorable Andrew Colville changes his seat: it is to bring himself into a better light for observing that picture in the window, which, with a critic's delight, he notes and outlines. But Katie all the while is quite unconscious, and now takes two or three meditative stitches, and now leans on the frame, idly musing, without a thought that any one sees or looks at her. By-and-by Mr. Colville rises, to stand by the crimson curtain where Sir Alexander stood on the previous night, and Katie at last becomes conscious of a look of admiration very different from the shy glances of the youthful knight. But Mr. Colville is full thirty: the little belle has a kind of compassionate forbearance with him, and is neither angry nor fluttered. She has but indifferent cause to be flattered, it is true, for the Honorable Andrew admires her just as he admires the magnificent lace which droops over his thin white hands; but still he is one of the *cognoscenti*, and bestows his notice only on the beautiful.

And he talks to her, pleased with the shrewd answers which she sometimes gives; and Katie has to rein in her wandering thoughts, and feels guilty when she finds herself inattentive to this grandest of grand gentlemen; while Lady Betty, looking

over at them anxiously from her great chair, thinks that little Katie's head will be turned.

It is in a fair way; for when Mr. Colville, smiling his sweetest smile to her, has bowed himself out, and Katie goes upstairs to change her dress preparatory to a drive in Lady Betty's great coach, Bauby approaches her mysteriously with a little cluster of white rosebuds in her hand.

"Muckle fash it has ta'en to get them at this time o' the year, Miss Katie, ye may depend," said the oracular Bauby; "and ye ken best yoursel wha they're frae."

The white rose—the badge of rebellion! But the little Whig puts it happily in her breast, and, when Bauby leaves her, laughs aloud in wonderment and pleasure; but, alas! only as she laughed, not very long ago, at this new black mantle or these cambric ruffles; for you are only a new plaything, gallant Sir Alexander, with some novelty and excitement about you. You are not the hero.

CHAPTER XII.

THE little town of Anstruther stands on the side of the Firth, stretching its lines of gray red-roofed houses closely along the margin of the water. Sailing past its little quiet home-like harbor, you see one or two red sloops peacefully lying at anchor beside the pier. These sloops are always there. If one comes and another goes, the passing spectator knows it not. On that bright clear water, tinged with every tint of the rocky bed below—which, in this glistening autumn day, with only wind enough to ruffle it faintly now and then, looks like some beautiful jasper curiously veined and polished, with streaks of salt sea-green, and sober brown, and brilliant blue, distinct and pure below the sun—these little vessels lie continually, as much a part of the scene as that gray pier itself, or the houses yonder of the twin towns. Twin towns there must be, as you learn from those two churches which elevate their little spires above the congregated roofs. The spires themselves look as if, up to a certain stage of their progress, they had contemplated being towers, but, changing their mind when the square erection had attained the form of a box, suddenly inclined their sides toward each

other, and became abrupt little steeples, whispering to you recollections of the Revolution Settlement, and the peace days of William and Mary. In one of them—or rather in its predecessor—the gentle James Melville once preached his Gospel he loved so well; and peaceful for two hundred years have they looked out over the Firth, to hail the boats coming and going to the sea-harvest; peacefully through their small windows the light has fallen on little children, having the names named over them which is above names; and now with a homely reverence they watch their dead.

A row of houses, straggling here and there into corners, turn their faces to the harbor. This is called the Shore. When you follow the line of rugged pavement nearly to its end, you come to boats, in every stage of progress, being mended—here with a great patch on the side—there resplendent in a new carpet, which now is drying in the sun. The boats are well enough, and so are the glistening spoils of the "herring dunnies" but quite otherwise is the order of the cured fish which salutes you in market at Anstruther. Let us say no evil of it—it is villainous, but it is the life of the town.

Straggling streets and narrow ways climb a little brae from the shore. There are the townsfolk, whose to-morrow's generations, is but a counterpart of to-day. Nevertheless, there have been fine people here—Maggie Lauder, Pious Tennant, Dr. Chalmers. The world has heard of the quiet burghs of East and West Anster.

A mile to the westward, on the sea-margin, lies Pittenweem, another seat of the family. Turn along the high-brae there, though you must very soon weary your steps. Here is this full magnificent Firth, coming softly in with a friendly smile over these low, dark, jutting rocks. If you out in a boat yonder, you would receive how the folds of its great garment in this calm you can not call them waves were marked and shaded. But here the shining vestment of sea-water has one wonderful prevailing tint of blue; and beneath it and the sky lingers yonder the snowy sails of a passing ship;—here are red specks of fishing-boats straying toward the mouth of the Firth, beyond the high rock—home of sea-mews—the house Isle of May. Far over, close to the opposite shore, lies a mass of some 24

gray and shapeless, resting like a great shell upon the water—that is the Bass; and behind it there is a shadow on the coast, which you can dimly see, but can not define—that is Tantallon, the stronghold of the stout Douglasses; and westward rises the abrupt cone of North Berwick Law, with a great calm bay stretching in from its feet, and a fair green country retreats beyond, from the water-side to the horizon line.

Turn now to the other hand, cross the high-road, and take this footpath through the fields. Gentle Kellie Law yonder stands quietly under the sunshine, watching his peaceful dominions. Yellow stubble-fields stretch, bare and dry, over these slopes; for no late acre now yields a handful of ears to be gleaned or garnered. But in other fields the harvest work goes on. Here is one full of work-people—quieter than the wheat harvest, not less cheery—out of the rich dark fragrant soil gathering the ripe potato, then in a fresh youthful stage of its history, full of health and vigor; and plows are pacing through other fields; and on this fresh breeze, slightly chilled with coming winter, although brightened still by a fervent autumnal sun, there comes to you at every corner the odor of the fertile, fruitful earth.

Follow this burn;—it is the same important stream which forms the boundary between Anstruther Easter and Wester; and when it has led you a circuit through some half-dozen fields, you come upon a little cluster of buildings gathered on its side. Already, before you reach them, that rustling sound tells you of the mill; and now you have only to cross the wooden bridge (it is but two planks, though the water foams under it), and you have reached the miller's door.

That little humble cot-house, standing respectfully apart, with the miller's idle cart immediately in front of it, is the dwelling-place of Robert Moulter, the miller's man; but the miller's own habitation is more ambitious. In the strip of garden before the door there are some rose-bushes, some "apple-ringie," and long plumes of gardener's garters; and there is a pointed window in the roof, bearing witness that this is a two-storied house of superior accommodation: the thatch itself is fresh and new—very different from that mossy, dilapidated one of the cottar's house; and above the porch flourishes a superb "fouat." The door, as usual, is hospitably open, and you

see that within all are prepared for going abroad; for there is a penny wedding in the town, which already has roused all Anster.

Who is this, standing by the window, cloaked and hooded, young, but a matron, and with that beautiful happy light upon her face? Under her hood, young as she is, appears the white edge of lace, which proves her to have assumed already over the soft brown shining hair which crosses her forehead, the close cap of the wife; but nothing remains of the old shy sad look, to tell you that this is Isabell Stewart. Nqr is it. Mrs. Stewart there, in her crimson plaid and velvet hood, who is at present delivering a lecture on household economics, to which her daughter listens with a happy smile, would be the first to set you right if you spoke that old name. Not Isabell Stewart—Lddy Kilbrachmont!—a landed woman, head of a plentiful household, and the crown and honor of the thrifty mother, whose training has fitted her for such a lofty destiny, whose counsels help her to fill it so well.

Janet, equipped like the rest, goes about the apartment, busily setting every thing "out of the road." The room is very much like the family room in Kellie Mill: domestic architecture of this homely class is not capable of much variety; and hastily Janet thrusts the same pretty wheel into a corner, and her mother locks the glistening doors of the oak aumrie. Without stands Philip Landale, speaking of his crops to the miller; and a good-looking young sailor, *fiancee* of the coquettish Janet, lingers at the door, waiting for her.

But there is another person in the background, draping the black lace which adorns her new cloak gracefully over her arm, throwing back her shoulders with a slightly ostentatious, disdainful movement, and holding up her head like Lady Anne. Ah, Katie! simple among the great people, but very anxious to look like a grand lady among the small! Very willing are you in your heart to have the unsophisticated fun of this penny wedding to which you are bound, but with a dignified reluctance are you preparing to go; and though Isabell smiles and Janet pretends to laugh, Janet's betrothed is awed, and thinks there is something very magnificent about Lady Anne Erskine's friend. They make quite a procession as they cross the burn, and wind along the pathway toward the town;—Janet and her companion hurrying on first.

young Kilbrachmont following, very proud of the wife who holds his arm, and looking with smiling admiration on the little pretty sister at his other hand; while the miller and his wife bring up the rear.

"Weel, I wouldna be a boaster," said Mrs. Stewart; "it would ill set us, wi' sae muckle reason as we have to be thankful. But just look at that bairn. It's my fear she'll be getting a man o'anither rank than ours, the little cuttie! I wouldna say but she looks down on Kilbrachmont his ain very sel."

"She's no blate to do ony thing o' the kind," said the miller.

"And how's the like o' you to ken?" retorted his wife. "It's my ane blame, nae doubt, for speaking to ye. Ye're a' very weel with your happer and your meal, John Stewart; but what should you ken about young womenfolk?"

"Weel, weel, sae be it. Isabell," said John. "It's a mercy ye think ye understand yoursels, for to simple folk ye're faddomless, like the auld enemy. I pretend to nae discernment amang ye."

"There winna be ane like her in the haill Town House," said Mrs. Stewart to herself; "no Isabell even, let alane Janet; and the bit pridefu' look—the little cuttie!—as if *she* was ony better than her neighbors."

The Town House of West Anster is a low-roofed, small-windowed room, looking out to the church-yard on one side, and to a very quiet street on the other; for West Anster is a suburban and rural place, in comparison with its more active brother on the other side of the burn, by whom it is correspondingly despised. Climbing up a narrow staircase, the party entered the room, in which at present there was very little space for locomotion, as two long tables, flanked by a double row of forms, and spread for a dinner, at which it was evident the article guest would be a most plentiful one, occupied almost the whole of the apartment. The company had just begun to assemble; and Katie, now daintily condescending to accept her brother-in-law's arm, returned with him to the foot of the stair, there to await the return of the marriage procession from the manse, at which just now the ceremony was being performed.

The street is overshadowed by great trees—which, leaning over the church-yard wall on one side, and surrounding the manse, which is only a few yards further down, on the other—darken the little

street, and let in the sunshine piecemeal, in bars and streaks, through thinning yellow foliage. There is a sort of approaching music; a brisk fiddle forming "Fie let us a' to the bride" in its most animated style; and gradually the procession becomes visible, ascending the dark gates of the manse. The bridegroom is an Anster fisherman. He has all the breath of salt water on them, these blue-jacketed sturdy fellows who form his retinue, with their wheedling favors. And creditable to the town are those manly sons of hennet, to danger from the cradle. The bride, the daughter of a Kilbrachmont, was a servant in Kilbrachmont's house, and it is the kindly connection between the employer and the employed which brings the whole family of Landis-Stewarts to the penny wedding. The pretty and young, this bride; and the glances in her hair, as she droops her covered head, and fixes her shy eyes to the ground. A long train of attendant brides follows her; and nothing but the ribbons, snooded with silken ribbons, of the young heads over which these lines of sunshine glisten as the procession passes on.

With her little cloak hanging back over her shoulders, and her small head looking down, or rather looking up, this humble bride is undeniably the little Katie Stewart, and smiling, which she intends to be patronizing, which by no means succeeds in being. Katie stands back to let the bride pass, and the bride does pass, drooping her blushing face lower and lower, as the master wishes her joy, and shakes his bashful, reluctant hand. But the maid, a simple fisherman's daughter, with admiration of the little maid, Katie, abruptly halts before her, and says to the young fisherman who is with her, that Kilbrachmont and the little must enter first. Katie is pleased. The girl's admiration strikes her more than gazing glances of ever so many wooers; and with such a little bit of Lady Anne might have given, and a flush mounting to her forehead, in all her pretended self-possession, she stepped into the procession, and entered the room after the bride.

Who is this so busy and popular in the youthful company already assembled? You can see him from the door.

he is at the further end of the room, overtopping all his neighbors like a youthful Saul. And handsomely the sailor's jacket sits on his active, well-formed figure; and he stoops slightly, as though he had some fear of this low dingy roof. He has a fine face too, browned with warm suns, and gales; for William Morison has sailed in the Mediterranean, and is to be mate, this next voyage, of the gay Levant schooner, which now lies loading in Leith harbor. Willie Morrison! Only the brother of Janet's betrothed, little Katie; so you are prepared to be good to him, and to patronize your future brother-in-law.

His attention was fully occupied just now. But suddenly his popularity fails in that corner, and gibes take the place of approbation. What ails him? What has happened to him? But he does not answer; he only changes his place, creeping gradually nearer, nearer, looking—alas, for human presumption!—at you, little Katie Stewart—magnificent, dignified you!

It is a somewhat rude, plentiful dinner; and there is a perfect crowd of guests. William Wood, the Elie joiner, in the dark corner yonder, counts the heads with an inward chuckle, and congratulates himself that, when all these have paid their half crowns, he shall carry a heavy pocketful home with him, in payment of the homely furniture he has made; and the young couple have the price of their plenshing cleared at once. But the scene is rather a confused noisy scene, till the dinner is over.

Now clear away these long encumbering tables, and tune your doleful fiddles quickly, ye musical men, that the dancers may not wait. Katie tries to think of the stately minuets which she saw and danced in Edinburgh; but it will not do: it is impossible to resist the magic of those inspiring reels; and now Willie Morison is bending his high head down to her, and asking her to dance.

Surely—yes—she will dance with him kindly and condescendingly, as with a connection. No fear palpitates at little Katie's heart—not a single throb of that tremor with which she saw Sir Alexander approach the window-seat in Lady Colville's drawing-room; and shy and quiet looks Willie Morison, as she draws on that graceful lace glove of hers, and gives him her hand.

Strangely his great fingers close over it,

and Katie, looking up with a little wonder catches just his retreating, shrinking eye. It makes her curious, and she begins to watch; begins to notice how he looks at her stealthily, and does not meet her eye with frankness as other people do. Katie draws herself up, and again becomes haughty, but again it will not do. Kindly looks meet her on all sides, friendly admiration, approbation, praise; and the mother watching her proudly yonder, and those lingering shy looks at her side. She plays with her glove in the intervals of the dance—draws it up on her white arm, and pulls it down: but it is impossible to fold the wings of her heart and keep it still, and it begins to flutter with vague terror, let her do what she will to calm its beating down.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE burn sings under the moon, and you can not see it; but yonder where it bends round the dark corner of this field, it glimmers like a silver bow. Something of witchcraft and magic is in the place and time. Above, the sky over-flooded with the moonbeams; behind, the Firth quivering and trembling under them in an ecstasy of silent light; below, the grass which presses upon the narrow footpath so dark and colorless, with here and there a visible gem of dew shining among its blades like a fallen star. Along that high-road, which stretches its broad white line westward, lads and lasses are trooping home, and their voices strike clearly into the charmed air, but do not blend with it as does that lingering music which dies away in the distance far on the other side of the town, and the soft voice of this burn near at hand. The homeward procession to the Milton is different from the outward bound. Yonder, steadily at their sober, every day pace, go the miller and his wife. You can see her crimson plaid faintly, through the silvered air which pales its color; but you can not mistake the broad outline of John Stewart, or the little active figure of the mistress of the Milton. Young Kilbrachmont and Isabella have gone home by another road, and Janet and her betrothed are "convoying" some of their friends on the way to Pittenweem, and will not turn back till they pass that little eerie house at the Kirk

Latch, where people say the Red Slippers delight to promenade; so never look doubtfully over your shoulder, anxious Willie Morison, in fear lest the noisy couple yonder overtake you, and spoil this silent progress home. Now and then Mrs. Stewart, rapidly marching on before, turns her head to see that you are in sight; but nothing else—for gradually these voices on the road soften and pass away—comes on your ear or eye unpleasantly to remind you that there is a host of beings in the world, besides yourself and this shy reluctant companion whose hand rests on your arm.

For under the new laced mantle, of which she was so proud this morning, Katie Stewart's heart is stirring like a bird. She is a step in advance of him, eager to quicken this slow pace; but he lingers—constantly lingers, and some spell is on her, that she can not bid him hasten. Willie Morison!—only the mate of that pretty Levant schooner which lies in Leith harbor; and the little proud Katie tries to be angry at the presumption which ventures to approach her—her, to whom Sir Alexander did respectful homage—whom the Honorable Andrew signaled out for admiration; but Katie's pride, only as it melts and struggles, makes the magic greater. He does not speak a great deal; but when he does, she stumbles strangely in her answers; and then Katie feels the blood flush to her face, and again her foot advances quickly on the narrow path, and her hand makes a feint to glide out of that restraining arm. No, think it not, little Katie—once you almost wooed your heart to receive into it, among all the bright dreams which have their natural habitation there, the courtly youthful knight, whose reverent devoirs charmed you into the land of old romance; but stubborn and honest, the little wayward heart refused. Now let your thoughts, alarmed and anxious, press round their citadel and keep this invader out. Alas! the besieged fortress trembles already, lest its defenders should fail and falter; and angry and petulant grow the resisting thoughts, and they swear to rash vows in the silence. Rash vows—vows in which there lies a hot impatient premonition, that they must be broken very soon.

Under those reeds, low beneath those little overhanging banks tufted with waving rushes, you scarcely could guess this burn was there, but for the tinkling of its unseen steps: but they walk beside it like

listeners entranced by fairy music. The silence does not oppress nor embarrass them now, for that ringing voice fills it up as it is like a third person—a magical third person, whose presence disturbs not their solitude.

"Katie!" cries the house-mother, turning back to mark how far behind the lingerers are: and Katie again imperceptibly quickens her pace, and draws her companion on. The burn grows louder as rushing past the idle wheel of the mill, and Mrs. Stewart has crossed the bridge, and they hear, through the air, the hasty sound with which she turns the great key in the door. Immediately there are visible evidences that the mistress of the house is within it again: the sudden glow brightens the dark wall, and throws a cheerful flickering light on the open door: but the moon glances at the dark burn, pursuing the foam as it flows down that descent it hurries over the wet stones, which impede its progress, glimmer dubiously in the light, and throws its splendor over all. Linger, Katie—slower and slower grow the steps of your companion; linger to make the night beautiful—to feel in your heart you never felt before, how beautiful.

Only Willie Morison! And yet curiosity prompts you to look out and watch him from your window in the night as you lay your cloak aside. He is standing still by the burn—leaving it reluctant, slow steps—looking back as if he could not make up his mind to go away: and hastily, with a start, which the darkness gently covers, withdraw from the window, little Katie, knowing that it is quite impossible she could have seen you, yet trembling as she has.

The miller has the great Bible on the table, and bitter is the reproof which he gives the late-returning Janet, as she stands at the open door and calls across the burn. It is somewhat late, and Janet yawns as she seats herself on the background, out of the vigilant miller's eye, which, seeing every thing, gives no sign of weariness; and Katie meditates, leaning her head upon her hand, and her little Bible in the shadow of her arm, as the family devotion begins. But it ends, and again, before it has ended, Katie's guilty blood flush over her face, for the sacred words have faded from before her downcast eyes, and she has

only the retreating figure going slowly away in the moonlight—a blush of indignant shame and self-anger, too, as well as guilt; for this is no Sir Alexander—no hero—but only Willie Morison.

"Send that monkey hame, Isabell," said John Stewart. He had just returned thanks and taken up his bonnet, as he rose from their homely breakfast-table next morning. "Send that monkey hame, I say; I'll no hae my house filled wi' lads again for ony gilpie's pleasure. Let Katie's joes gang up to Kellie if they maun make fules o'themsels. Janet's ser'd, Gude be thankit; let's hae nae mair o't noo."

"It's my desire, John Stewart, you would just mind your ain business, and leave the house to me," answered his wife. "If there's ae sight in the world I like waur than anither, it's a man pitting his hand into a housewifeskep. I ne'er meddle with your meal. Robbie and you may be tooming it a' down the burn, for aught I ken; but leave the lassies to me, John, my man. I hae a hand that can grip them yet, and that's what ye ne'er were gifted with."

The miller shrugged his shoulders, threw on his bonnet, but without any further remonstrance went away.

"And how lang are ye to stay, Katie?" resumed Mrs. Stewart.

"I'll gang up to Kilbraohmont, if ye're wearying on me, mother," answered the little belle.

"Haud your peace, ye cuttie. Is that a way to answer your mother, and me slaving for your guid, nicht and day? But hear ye, Katie Stewart, I'll no hae Willie Morison coming courting here; ae scone's enow o' a baking. Janet there is to be cried with Alick—what he could see in her, I canna tell—next Sabbath but twa; and though the Morisons are very decent folk, we're sib enough wi' ae wedding. So ye'll mind what I say, if Willie Morison comes here at e'en."

"I dinna ken what you mean, mother," said Katie, indignantly.

"I'll warrant Katie thinks him no guid enough," said Janet, with a sneer.

"Will ye mind your wark, ye tau-pie? What's your business with Katie's thoughts? And let me never mair see you sit there with a red face, Katie Stewart, and tell a lie under my very e'en. I'll no thole't. Janet, redd up that table. Merran, you're wanted out in the East Park: if Robbie and you canna be done

with that pickle taties the day, ye'll ne'er make sant to your kail; and now I'm gaun in to Anster mysel—see ye, pit some birr in your fingers the time I'm away."

"Never you heed my mother, Katie," said Janet benevolently, as Mrs. Stewart's crimson plaid began to disappear over the field. "She says aye a hantle mair than she means: and Willie may come the nicht, for a' that."

"Willie may come! And do you think I care if he never crossed Anster Brig again?" exclaimed Katie with burning indignation.

"Weel, I wouldna say. He's a bonnie lad," said Janet, as she lifted the shining plates into the lower shelf of the oak aumrie. "And if you dinna care, Katie, what gars ye have such a red face?"

"It's the fire," murmured Katie, with sudden humiliation: for her cheeks indeed were burning—alas! as the brave Sir Alexander's name could never make them burn.

"Weel, he's to sail in three weeks, and he'll be a fule if he troubles his head about a disdainfu' thing that wouldna stand up for him, puir chield. The first night ever Alick came after me, I wouldna have held my tongue and heard ony body speak ill of him; and yesterday's no the first day—no by mony a Sabbath in the kirk, and mony a night at hame—that Willie Morrison has gien weary looks at you."

"He can keep his looks to himsel," said Katie, angrily, as the wheel *birled* under her impatient hand. "It was only to please ye a' that I let him come hame with me last night; and he's no a bonnie lad, and I dinna care for him, Janet."

Janet, with the firelight reddening that round, stout, ruddy arm with which she lifts from the crook the suspended kettle, pauses in the act to look into Katie's face. The eyelashes tremble on the flushed cheek—the head is drooping—poor little Katie could almost cry with vexation and shame.

Merran is away to the field—the sisters are alone; but Janet only ventures to laugh a little as she goes with some bustle about her work, and records Katie's blush and Katie's anger, for the encouragement of Willie Morison. Janet, who is experienced in such matters, thinks these are good signs.

And the forenoon glides away, while Katie sits absorbed and silent, turning the

pretty wheel, and musing on all these affronts which have been put upon her. Not the first by many days on which Willie Morison has dared to think of her! And she remembers Sir Alexander, and that moonlight night on which she watched him looking up at Lady Anne Erskine's window, but very faintly, very indifferently, comes before her the dim outline of the youthful knight; whereas most clearly visible in his blue jacket, and with the fair hair blown back from his ruddy, manly face, appears this intruder, this Willie Morison.

The days are growing short. Very soon now the dim clouds of the night droop over these afternoon hours in which Mrs. Stewart says, "Naeboddy can ever settle to wark." It is just cold enough to make the people out of doors brisk in their pace, and to quicken the blood it exhilarates; and the voices of the field-laborers calling to each other as the women gather up the potato baskets and hoes which they have used in their work, and the men loose their horses from the plow, and lead them home, ring into the air with a clear musical cadence which they have not at any other time. Over the dark Firth, from which now and then you catch a long glistening gleam, which alone in the darkness tells you it is there, now suddenly blazes forth that beacon on the May. Not a sober light, shining under glass cases with the reflectors of science behind, but an immense fire piled high up in that iron cage which crowns the strong gray tower; a fiery, livid, desperate light, reddening the dark waters which welter and plunge below, so that you can fancy it rather the torch of a forlorn hope, fiercely gleaming upon ships dismasted and despairing men, than the soft clear lamp of help and kindness guiding the coming and going passenger through a dangerous way.

The night is dark, and this ruddy window in the Milton is innocent of a curtain. Skillfully the fire has been built, brightly it burns, paling the ineffectual lamp up there, in its cruse on the high mantle-piece. The corners of the room are dark, and Merran, still moving about here and there, like a wandering star, crosses the orbit of this homely domestic sun, and anon mysteriously disappears into the gloom. Here, in an arm-chair, sits the miller, his bonnet laid aside, and in his hand a Caledonian Mercury, not of the most recent date, which he alternately

elevates to the lamplight, and depresses to catch the bright glow of the fire; for the miller's eyes are not so young as they were, though he scorns spectacles still.

Opposite him, in the best place for light, sits Mrs. Stewart, diligently mending a garment of stout linen, her fingers spinning, which time has begun to affect. But her employment does not entirely engross her vigilant eyes; she glances perpetually round with quick scrutiny, accompanied by remark, repetition, or a bit of pithy advice—advice which she dares openly refuse to take.

Janet is knitting a gray "rigg" stocking, a duplicate of these ones which are basking before the fire on John Stewart's substantial legs. Constantly her elbow is straying on the floor, or her wires becoming entangled; and when her mother's eyes are otherwise directed, the hoyden lets her hands fall into her lap and gives her whole attention to the repeated explosive jokes which Alice Macdonald is producing behind her chair.

Over there, where the light falls on her, though it does not do her so much service as the others, little Katie sits at the wheel, and spins with a cast face. Her dress is very carefully arranged—much more so than it would have been in Kellie—and the graceful curls ruffles droop over her gloved arms; she holds her head, stooping a little forward indeed, but still in a dignified attitude, with conscious pride and inward grace. Richly the flickering fire brings out the golden gloss of the hair upon her cheek, and the cheek is a little flushed; but Katie is determined and dignified, and very rarely cheated into a momentary smile.

For he is here, this Willie Morison, lingering over her wheel and her shadow, speaking now and then when he can get an opportunity; but Katie is blank and unconscious—will not hear—and holds her head stiffly in one position rather than catch a glimpse of him as he sways his tall person behind her. The lingering figures, half in the gloom, half in the light, encircle the little company by the fireside, and contribute to the scene, which, among them is, kept up merrily by Mrs. Stewart herself leading and laughing it, and only the dignified Katie declining to join in the gossip and raillery, which, after all, is quite as usual—and—save that it is a little fish—

ly in any respect less delicate than the *badinage* of more refined circles.

"It's no often Anster gets a blink of your daughter. Is Miss Katie to stay lang?" asked a young farmer, whom Katie's dress and manner had awed into humility, as she intended they should.

"Katie, ye're no often so mim. What-for can ye no answer yoursel?" said Mrs. Stewart.

"Lady Anne is away to England with Lady Betty—for Lord Colville's ship's come in," said Katie sedately. "There's nobody at the Castle but Lady Erskine. Lady Anne is to be back in three weeks. She says that in her letter."

In her letter! Little Katie Stewart then receives letters from Lady Anne Erskine! The young farmer was put down; visions of seeing her a countess yet crossed his eyes and disenchanted him. "She'll make a bonnie lady; there's few of them like her; but she'll never do for a poor man's wife," he muttered to himself as he withdrew a step or two from the vicinity of the unattainable sour plums.

But not so Willie Morison. "I'll be three weeks of sailing myself," said the mate of the schooner, scarcely above his breath; and no one heard him but Katie.

Three weeks! The petulant thoughts rushed round their fortress, and vowed to defend it to the death. But in their very heat, alas! was there not something which betrayed a lurking traitor in the citadel, ready to display the craven white flag from its highest tower?

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE weeks! Three misty enchanted weeks, with only words, and looks, and broken reveries in them, and all the common life diverted into another channel, like the mill-burn. True it is, that all day long Katie sits strangely dim and silent, spinning yarn for her mother, dreamily hearing, dreamily answering—her heart and her thoughts waging a perpetual warfare; for always there comes the mystic evening, the ruddy firelight, the attendant circle behind, and Katie's valor steals away, and Katie's thoughts whirl, and reel, and find no standing ground. Alas! for the poor little pride, which now tremblingly, with all its allies gone, has to fight its battle single-handed, and begins

to feel like a culprit thus deserted, for the climax hour is near at hand.

Lady Anne has returned to Kellie. Only two or three days longer can Katie have at the mill—only one day longer has Willie Morison; for the little Levant schooner has received her cargo, and lies in Leith Roads, waiting for a wind, and her lingering mate must join her to-morrow.

The last day! But Katie must go to Kilbrachmont to see Isabell. The little imperious mother will perceive no reluctance; the little proud daughter bites her lip, and with tears trembling in her eyes—indignant, burning tears for her own weakness—will not show it; so Katie again threw on the black-laced mantle, again arranged her gloves under her cambric ruffles, and with her heart beating loud and painfully, and the tears only restrained by force, under her downcast eyelids, set out toward kindly Kellie Law yonder, to see her sister.

It is late in October now, and the skies are looking as they never look except at this time. Dark, pale, colorless, revealing every thing that projects upon them, with a bold sharp outline, which scarcely those black rolling vapors can obscure. Overhead there is a great cloud stopping upon the country as black as night; but lighter are those misty tissues sweeping down pendant from it upon the hills, which the melancholy wind curls and waves about like so many streamers upon the mystic, threatening sky. There has been a great fall of rain, and the sandy country roads are damp, though not positively wet; but that great black cloud, say the rural sages, to whom the atmosphere is a much-studied philosophy, will not dissolve to-day.

Dark is the Firth, tossing yonder its white-foam crest on the rocks; dark the far-away cone of North Berwick Law, over whose head you see a long retreating range of cloudy mountains, piled high and black into the heavens;—and there before us, the little steeple of this church of Pit tenween thrusts itself fearlessly into the sky; while under it cluster the low-roofed houses, looking like so many frightened fugitive children clinging to the knees of some brave boy, whose simplicity knows no fear.

And drawing her mother's crimson plaid over her slight silken mantle, Katie Stewart turns her face to Kellie Law, along this still and solitary road, while the damp

wind sighs among the trees above her, and, detaching one by one these fluttering leaves, drops them in the path of her feet. Never before has Katie known what it was to have a "sair heart." Now there is a secret pang in that young breast of hers—a sadness which none must guess, which she herself denies to herself with angry blushes and bitter tears; for "she doesna care"—no, not if she should never see Willie Morison more—"she doesna care!"

Some one on the road behind pursues the little hurrying figure, with its fluttering crimson plaid and laced apron, with great impatient strides. She does not hear the foot, the road is so carpeted with wet leaves; but at every step he gains upon her.

And now, little Katie, pause. Now with a violent effort send back these tears to their fountain, and look once more with dignity—once more, if it were the last time, with haughty pride, into his face, and ask, with that constrained voice of yours, what brings him here.

"I'm to sail the morn," answered Willie Morison

actor in its far-stretching boughs and now trunk; and under them is the house of Kilbrachmont.

Not a very great house, though the neighboring cottars think it so. A substantial square building, of two stories built of rough gray stone, and thatched. Nor is there any thing remarkable in its immediate vicinity, though, "to pass Isabell" the most effectual of arguments with the young Laird, some pains are very great, yet more than usual have been bestowed upon this piece of ground in front of the house. Soft, close-set turf, green and smooth as velvet, sown from the door to the outer paling with clothing with its rich verdure the most the great ash trees, and some few small flowers are in the borders. At the corner a great luxuriant rosebush stands on either side; and the wall of the garden is covered with the bare network of an immense pear-tree, in spring as white blossoms as the grass is with green daisies. From the windows you get a far-off glimpse of the Firth, and on the other hand, a little humble church and school-house look out from among the trees on the green slopes of Kellie Law above the house behind.

The door is open, and you enter a large roomed earthen-floored kitchen, with a large open fire-place, within which, on the warm stone benches which project from its ruddy cavern, sits a beggar woman with a couple of children, who are warming their poor little feet before the fire in the standing grate, till the fire becomes almost as painful as the cold an hour ago. The woman has a basket on her lap, half full of the comfortable victuals which has been to-day, and is always, the principal dish at dinner, in those frugal, plentiful houses; and with that great horn spoon, is taking out warm and grateful provision, and distributing it to the children at her feet, who have already devoured their supply. In the kindly fashion of charity, common at that time.

One stout woman-servant stands by the table baking, and the girdle suspended from the crook, hangs over the bright fire. While near the fireside another is spinning wool on "the muckle wheel." It is never these wholesome ruddy country-folk do not scorn to do "out work," in winter one of them almost constantly spins. Several doors open off this cosy kitchen.

CHAPTER XV.

THE clouds have withdrawn from the kindly brow of Kellie Law. Over him, this strange pale sky reveals itself, with only one floating streak of black gauzy vapor on it, like the stolen scarf of some weird lady, for whom this forlorn wind pines in secret. And at the foot of the hill lie great fields of rich dark land, new plowed; and, ascending by this pathway, by-and-by you will come to a house sheltered in that cluster of trees. In the corner of the park, here, stands a round tower—not very high, indeed, but massy and strong; and just now a flock of timid inhabitants have alighted upon it and entered by the narrow doors; for it is not any thing warlike, but only the peaceful erection which marks an independent lairdship—the dovecot of these lands of Kilbrachmont.

High rises the grassy bank on the other side of the lane, opposite "the Dooocot Park; but just now you only see mosses and fallen leaves, where in early summer primroses are rife; and now these gray ash trees make themselves visible, a stately brotherhood, each with an individual char-

One of them is a little ajar, and from it now and then comes a fragment of song, and an accompanying hum as of another wheel. It is the south-room, the sitting-room of the young "guidwife."

And she sits there by her bright hearth, spinning fine yarn, and singing to herself as those sing whose hearts are at rest. Opposite the fire hangs a little round glass, which reflects the warm light, and the graceful figure prettily, making a miniature picture of them on the wall. A large fine sagacious dog sits on the other side of the hearth, looking up into her face, and listening with evident relish to her song. You can see that its sweet, pathetic music even moves him a little, the good fellow, though the warm bright fire makes his eyes wink drowsily now and then, and overcomes him with temptation to stretch himself down before it for his afternoon's sleep.

Spinning and singing—at home, in this sweet, warm atmosphere, with no dread or evil near her—and so sits Isabell.

A hasty step becomes audible in the kitchen. Bell at the wheel by the hearth cries aloud, "Eh, Miss Katie, is this you?" And Ranger pricks up his ears; while Isabell's hand rests on her wheel for a moment, and she looks toward the door.

The door is hastily flung open—as hastily closed—and little Katie, with the crimson plaid over her bright hair, and traces of tears on her cheek, rushes in, and throwing herself at Isabell's feet, puts her arms round her waist, and buries her head in the lap of her astonished sister.

"Katie, what ails ye?" exclaimed Lady Kilbrachmont; and Ranger, alarmed and sympathetic draws near, to lick the little gloved hands, and fingers red with cold, which lie on his mistress's knee.

"Katie, what ails ye? Speak to me, bairn." But Isabell is not so much alarmed as Ranger, for "exceeding peace has made" her "bold."

"Oh, Isabell," sighed little Katie, lifting from her sister's lap a face which does not, after all, look so very sorrowful, and which Ranger would fain salute too—"oh, Isabell! it's a' Willie Morison."

"Weel, weel, Katie, my woman, what needs ye greet about it?" said the matron sister, with kindly comprehension. "I saw it a' week since. I kent it would be so."

And Leddy Kilbrachmont thought it *no mesalliance*—did not feel that the lit-

tle beauty had disgraced herself. It dried the tears of Katie Stewart.

But Ranger did not yet quite understand what was the matter, and became very solicitous and affectionate; helping by his over-anxiety, good fellow, to remove the embarrassment of his young favorite.

So Katie rose, with a dawning smile upon her face, and stooping over Ranger, caressed and explained to him, while Isabell with kindly hands disembarrassed her of the crimson plaid which still hung over her shoulders. The well-preserved, precious crimson plaid—if Mrs. Stewart had only seen that faint print of Ranger's paw upon it! But it makes a sheen in the little glass, to which Katie turns to arrange the bright curls which the wind has cast into such disorder. The tears are all dried now, and as her little fingers, still red with cold, though now they are glowing hot, twist about the golden hair on her cheek, her face resumes its brightness; but it is not now the sunny, fearless light of the morning. Not any longer do these blue eyes of hers meet you bravely, frankly, with open, unembarrassed looks; drooping, glimmering under the downcast eyelashes, darting up now and then a shy, softened, almost deprecating glance, while themselves shine so, that you can not but fancy there is always the bright medium of a tear to see them through.

"And where is he then, Katie? Did you get it a' owre coming up the road? Where is Willie now?" said Isabell.

"We met Kilbrachmont at the Doocot Park," said Katie, seating herself by the fireside, and casting down her eyes as she twisted the long ears of Ranger through her fingers; "and I ran away, Isabell, for Kilbrachmont saw that something was wrang."

"There's naething wrang, Katie. He's a wiselike lad, and a weel-doing lad—if you werena such a proud thing yoursel. But, woman, do you think you could ever have been so happy as ye will be, if Willie Morison was some grand lord or ither, instead of what he is?"

Ranger had laid his head in Katie's lap, and was fixing a serious look upon her face; only he could see the happy liquid light in her eyes, which testified her growing content with Willie Morison; but Isabell saw the pout with which Katie indulged the lingering remains of her pride

"Woman, Katie! suppose it *had* been a young lord now, or the like of Sir Robert—ye would never have dared to speak to aye of your kin."

"And wha would have hindered me?" said Katie, with a glance of defiance.

"Wha would have hindered ye? Just your ain man, nae doubt, that had the best right. Ye ken yoursel it bid to have ended that way, Katie. Suppose it had been e'en sae, as the bit proud heart of ye would have had it, would ye have come in your coach to the Milton, Katie Stewart? would ye have ta'en my mother away in her red plaid, and set her down in your grand withdrawing-room, like my lady's mother? Ye needna lift up your e'en that way. I ken ye have spirit enough to do a' that; but what would my lord have said? and what would his friends? Na, na; my mother's gray hairs have honor on them in the Milton of Anster, and so have they here in Kilbrachmont, and so will they have in Willie Morison's house, when it comes to pass; but, Katie, they would have nane in Kellie Castle."

"I would just like to hear either lord or lady lightlie my mother," exclaimed Katie, with such a sudden burst of energy, that Ranger lifted his head and shook his ears in astonishment; "and I dinna ken what reason ye have, Isabell, to say that I ever wanted a lord. I never wanted ony body in this world that didna want me first."

"It may be sae; it may be sae," said the Leddy of Kilbrachmont, kindly, shedding back the hair from Katie's flushed face as she rose; "but whiles I get a glint into folk's hearts, for I mind mysel langsyne; and now be quiet, like a guid bairn, for there's the guidman and Willie, and I must see about their four-hours."

Little Katie thrust her chair back into the corner, with a sudden jerk, dislodging the head of the good, astonished Ranger. The "four-hours" was the afternoon refreshment, corresponding with our tea, just as the "eleven hours" was the luncheon.

Philip Landale was not so forbearing as his wife. He could not refrain from jokes and innuendoes, which made Katie's face burn more and more painfully, and elicited many a trembling, whispered remonstace: "Whisht, whisht, Kilbrachmont"—from Willie Morison; but the whole evening was rather an uneasy one, neither Isabell nor Katie was quite

sure about their mother's reception of this somewhat startling intelligence.

Katie was shy of going home—shy from being the first to tell the events of the day: and the good elder sister arranged for her that Willie should bid his farewell of his betrothed now, and leave her at Kilbrachmont, himself hurrying down to be at the Milton, before the hour of domestic worship should finally drive the house against visitors, there to show his suit to the miller and the miller's wife.

"Ye'll see us gaun down the Firth to-morn, Katie," said Willie Morison, as he stood with him at the door, to bid his farewell. "I'll gar them hoist a flag on the mainmast, to let you ken it's me; and dinna let down your heart, for we'll be six months away. We'll come at the summer, Katie."

"And suppose ye didna come at the summer, what for should I leave my heart?" asked the saucy Katie, who had recently recovered to show some part of her ancient temper.

"If aye was to believe ye," answered the departing mate. "Weel, it's nae way; but ye'll mind us sometimes when ye look at the Firth?"

In that pale sky, wading among black masses of clouds, the moon had risen, and faintly now was glimpsed far away in the distant water, where accustomed eyes could just see, and no more.

"Maybe," answered Katie Stewart, as she turned back to the threshold of Kilbrachmont.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is early morning—a fresh high, full of bracing, healthful sunshine—like yesterday as so near a relative, and the sky is blue over Kellie, and the clouds now, no longer black, drifting, lie motionless, entranced upon their boundless sea. Over the water there has been rain, and the roadsides and the remaining leaves glitter and sparkle in the sun. As you go down the road, you hear the tinkling of waterfalls—a burn somewhere, running, filled and freshened current, shining in the sun; and there is scarcely wind to impel the glistening leaves, as they fall a yard from their parent tree.

With the crimson plaid upon her arm, and the lace of her black silk mantle softly fluttering over the renewed glory of the tambric ruffles, Katie Stewart goes lightly down the road on her way home. The sun has dried this sandy path, so that it does no injury to the little handsome silver-buckled shoes, which twinkle, over it, though their meditative mistress, looking down upon them, is all unaware of the course they take. Ranger, from whom she has just parted, stands at the corner of the Doocot Park, looking after her with friendly admiring eyes, and only prevented by an urgent sense of duty from accompanying her through all the dangers of her homeward road; but little Katie, who never looks back—whose thoughts all travel before her, good Ranger, and who has not one glance to spare for what is behind—thinks of neither danger nor fatigue in the sunny four miles of way which lie between her and the Milton of Anster. Very soon three of those miles—through long sweeping quiet roads, disturbed only by an occasional sluggish cart, with its driver seated on its front, or errant fisherwoman with a laden creel penetrating on a commercial voyage into the interior—glide away under the little glancing feet, and Katie has come in sight of the brief steeple of Pittenweem, and the broad Firth beyond.

Stray down past the fisher-houses, Katie Stewart—past the invalidated boats—the caldrons of bark—the fisher girls at those open doors weaving nets—down to the shore of this calm sea. Now you are on “the braes,” treading the thin-bladed seaside grass; and when you see no schooner, lifting up snow-white sails in the west, your musing eyes glance downward—down those high steep cliffs to the beautiful transparent water, with its manifold tints, through which you see the shelves of rock underneath, brilliant, softened as yesterday your own eyes were, through tears unshed and sweet.

At your feet, but far below them, the water comes in with a continual ripple, which speaks to you like a voice; and for the first time—the first time, Katie Stewart, in all these eighteen years—there comes into your mind the reality of that great protecting care which fills the world. Between you and the Bass, the great Firth lies at rest; not calm enough to be insensible to that brisk breath of wind which flutters before you your black laced apron, but only sufficiently moved to show that

it lives, and is no dead inland lake. But yonder, gleaming out of the universal blue, is the May, with the iron cradle almost visible on the top of its steep tower; the May—the lighthouse island—telling of dangers hidden under those beautiful waves, of storms which shall stir this merry wind into frenzy, and out of its smiling, school-boy pranks bring the tragic feats of a revengeful giant. Ah, Katie Stewart! look again with awe and gravity on this treacherous, glorious sea. To watch one's dearest go forth upon it; to trust one's heart and hope to the tender mercies of this slumbering Titan;—there comes a shudder over the slight figure as it stoops forward, and one solitary child's sob relieves the laboring breast; and then little Katie lifts her head, and looks to the sky.

The sky, which continually girdles in this grand tumultuous element, and binds it, Titan as it is, as easily as a mother binds the garments of her child. Forth into God's care, Katie! into the great waters which lie inclosed within the hollow of His hand. Away under His sky—away upon this sea, His mighty vassal, than whom your own fluttering, fearful heart is less dutiful, less subordinate—fear not for your wanderer. Intermediate protection, secondary help, shall leave him, it is true; but safest of all is the Help over all, and he goes forth into the hand of God.

But still there is no sail visible up the Firth, except here and there a fishing-boat, or passing smack, and Katie wanders on—on, till she has reached the Billy Ness, a low green headland slightly projecting into the Firth, and sees before her the black rocks jutting far out into the clear water, and beyond them Anster harbor, with its one sloop loading at the pier.

Now look up, Katie Stewart! yonder it glides newly emerged from the deep shadow of Largo Bay, bearing close onward by the coast, that the captain's wife in Elie, and here, on the Billy Ness, little Katie Stewart, may see it gliding by—gliding with all its sails full to the wind, and the flag floating from the mast. And yonder, on the end of the pier—but you do not see them—Alick Morison and a band of his comrades are waiting, ready to wave their caps, and hail her with a cheer as she goes by. There is some one on the yard; bend over by this brown rock, Katie Stewart, that he may see your crimson plaid, and, seeing it, may uncover that broad manly brow of his, and cheer you with his waving

hand : but it will only feebly flutter that handkerchief in yours, and away and away glides the departing ship. Farewell.

It is out of sight, already touching the stronger currents of the German sea ; and Alick Morison long ago is home, and the sun tells that it is full noon. But Katie's roused heart has spoken to the great Father : out of her sorrowful musings, and the tears of her first farewell, she has risen up to speak—not the vague forms of usual prayer—but some real words in the merciful ear which hears continually ;—real words—a true supplication—and so she turns her face homeward, and goes calmly on her way.

And she is still only a girl ; her heart is comforted. In these seafaring places such partings are everyday matters ; and as she leaves the shore, and crosses the high-road, Katie fancies she sees him home again, and is almost glad. But it is full noonday, Katie—look up to the skies, and tremble for who can tell how angry the house-mother will be when you have reached home ?

Yonder is the Milton already visible ; ten brief minutes and the bridge will be crossed : hastily down upon this great stone Katie throws the crimson plaid—the precious Sabbath-day's plaid, never deposited in receptacle less dignified than the oak-press—and solemnly, with nervous fingers pauses on the burnside to “turn her apron.”

A grave and potent spell, sovereign for disarming the anger of mothers, when, at town-house ball, winter evening party, or summer evening tryst, the trembling daughter has staid too long ; but quite ineffectual the spell would be, Katie, if only Mrs. Stewart knew or could see how you have thrown down the crimson plaid.

Over the fire, hanging by the crook, the pot boils merrily, while Janet covers the table for dinner, and Merran, at the end of the room, half invisible, is scrubbing chairs and tables with enthusiasm and zeal. All this work must be over before the gudeman comes in from the mill, and Merran's cheeks glow as red as the sturdy arm, enveloped in wreaths of steam from her pail, with which she polishes the substantial deal chairs.

Mrs. Stewart herself sits by the fire in the easy-chair, knitting. There is some angry color on the little house-mother's face ; and Katie, with penitent, humble steps, crossing the bridge, can hear the loud indignant sound of her wires as she labors.

Dr drooping her head, carrying the crimson plaid reverently over her arm, as if she never could have used it disrespectfully, and casting shy, deprecating, appealing glances upward to her mother's face, Katie, downcast and humble, stands on the threshold of the Milton.

A single sympathetic glance from Janet tells her that she has at least one friend, but no one speaks a word to welcome her. Another stealthy, timid step, and she is fairly in ; but still neither mother nor sister express themselves conscious of her presence.

Poor little Katie ! her breast begins to heave with a sob, and thick tears gather to her eyes, as nervously her fingers play with the lace of her turned apron—a heartless, innocent, ineffectual spell—she could have borne, as she thinks, the amount of “flying ;” but this cruel spell kills her.

Another apprehensive trembling step, and now Katie stands between her mother and the window, stationary, in this downcast drooping attitude, like a statue, the crimson plaid draped over her arm, her fingers busy with the lace—nothing else moving about her but her eyelids, which now and then are hastily cast in appeal.

Very well was Mrs. Stewart at Katie's entrance before, but now the old woman falls across her busy hands, and she can no longer restrain—not even by her lips—the eager flood of words she burns to discharge themselves upon the head of the culprit.

So Mrs. Stewart laid down her work on her lap, and crossing her hands sternly and steadily in the face of the offender. Tremblingly Katie's long lashes drooped under this gaze, and she began to quiver, and the tears fell down on her cheek ; while up she went through the heaving breast, climbing the child's sob.

“Wha's this braw lady, Janet ! sure it's an honor to our pair house ! lookit for. Get a fine napkin out o' the napery press, and dight a chair—my lady will sit down.”

“Oh mother, mother !” sobbed Katie.

“So this is you, ye little cutty !—how daur you look me in the face !”

Katie had not been looking at her mother's face, but now she lifted her head bravely, tearful though they were.

turned without flinching the gaze fixed upon her. "Mother! I've done naething wrong."

"Ye've done naething wrong!—haud me in patience, that I may not paik her wi' my twa hands! Do ye ca' staying out a' night, out o' my will and knowledge, nae wrang? Do ye say it was nae wrang to spend this precious morning on the Billy Ness, watching the ship out wi' that ne'er-doweel in't? and sending him himsel, a puir penniless sailor chield, wi' no a creditable friend between this and him—"

"Willie Morison's a very decent lad, mother, and his friends are as gude as ours ony day," said Janet, indignantly.

"Haud your peace, ye gipsy! let me hear ye say anither word, and ye shall never see the face of ane of them mair;—to send the like o' him, I say, here on such an errand, after a' the siller that's been spent upon ye, and a' the care—I say how daur ye look me in the face?"

Katie tried another honest look of protest, but again her head drooped under the glowing eyes of her indignant mother.

"And what's she standing there for, to daur me, wi' a' her braws," exclaimed Mrs. Stewart, after a considerable interval of silent endurance on Katie's part—"and my guid plaid on her arm, as if it were her ain? My certy, my woman, ye'll need to come in o' your bravery: it's few silks or ruffles ye'll get off the wages of a common man. It's like to put me daft when I think o't!"

"He's no a common man; he's mate this voyage, and he's to be captain the next," interposed Janet, who had a personal interest in the reputation of Willie Morison.

"I order ye, Janet Stewart, to haud your peace: it's a' very weel for the like o' you; but look at her there, and tell me if it's no enough to pit a body daft?"

"What is't, mother?" asked the astonished Janet?

And Mrs. Stewart dared not tell—dared not betray her proud hope of seeing Katie "a grand lady" one day—perhaps a countess—with hasty skill she changed her tone.

"To see her standing there before me braving me wi' her braws, the cuttie!—the undutiful gipsy!—that I should ever say such a word to a bairn o' mine!"

Thus admonished, Katie stole away to bathe her eyes with fresh water, and take

off her mantle. Out of her mother's presence, a spark of defiance entered her mind. She would not be unjustly treated; she would return to Lady Anne.

But Katie's courage fell when she re-entered the family room, and heard again the reproaches of her mother. Humbly she stole away to the corner where stood the little wheel, to draw in a stool beside it, and begin to work.

"Let that be," said Mrs. Stewart peremptorily; "ye shall spin nae mair yarn to me; ye're owre grand a lady to spin to me; and stand out o' my light, Katie Stewart."

Poor little Katie! this compulsory idleness was a refinement of cruelty. With an irrepressible burst of sobbing, she threw herself down on a chair which Merran had newly restored to its place by the window, and, leaning her arms on the table beside her, buried her face in her hands. There is something very touching at all times in this attitude. The sympathy one might refuse to the ostentation of grief, one always bestows abundantly upon the hidden face; and as the dull green light through these thick window-panes fell on the pretty figure, the clasped arms, and bright disordered hair, and as the sobs which would not be restrained broke audibly through the apartment, the mother's heart was moved at last.

"Katie!"

But Katie does not hear. In her heart she is calling upon Isabell—upon Lady Anne—upon Willie—and bitterly believing that her mother has cast her off, and that there remains for her no longer a home.

"Katie, ye cuttie! What guid will ye do, greeting here, like to break your ain heart, and a' body else's? Sit up this moment, and draw to your wheel. Do you think ony mortal wi' feelings like ither folk could forbear anger, to see a lassie like you throw hersel away?"

CHAPTER XVII.

"But is it true, Katie?" asked Lady Anne.

In the west room at Kellie, Katie has resumed her embroidery—has resumed her saucy freedom, her pouts, her willfulness; and would convey by no means a flattering idea to Willie Morison of the impression

his attractions have made upon her, could he see how merry she is, many an hour when he dreams of her upon the sea.

"My mother never tells lees, Lady Anne," said Katie, glancing archly up to her friend's face.

"But Katie, I'm in earnest; you don't mean—surely, you don't mean to take this sailor when he comes in again! Katie, you!—but it's just a joke, I suppose. You all think there's something wrong if you have not a sweetheart."

"No me," said Katie, with some indignation, tossing back her curls. "I dinna care for a' the sweethearts in Fife."

"How many have you had," said Lady Anne, shaking her head and smiling, "since you were sixteen?"

"If ye mean folk that wanted to speak to us, or whiles to dance with us, or to convoy us hame, Lady Anne," said Katie, with a slight blush, availing herself of the plural, as something less embarrassing than the "me"—"I dinna ken, for that's naething; but real anes—"

Katie paused abruptly.

"Well, Katie, real ones?"

But an indefinite smile hovers about Katie's lip, and she makes no answer. It is very well, lest Lady Anne had been shocked beyond remedy; for the "real anes" are the rebel knight, and the Whig merchant sailor—Sir Alexander and Willie Morison!

"But this is not what I want," said Lady Anne; "tell me, Katie—now be true, and tell me—will you really take this sailor when he comes home?"

"Maybe," said Katie, with a pout, stooping down over her frame.

"But maybe will not do. I want to know; have you made up your mind? Will you, Katie?"

"He'll maybe no ask me when he comes back," said the evasive Katie, glancing up with an arch demure smile.

Lady Anne shook her head. Till she caught this smile, she had looked almost angry; but now she also smiled, and looked down from her high chair, with renewed kindness, upon her little *protégée*.

"Katie, you must let me speak to you. I will not say a word against him for himself; but he's just, you know, a common person. Katie, little Katie, many a one thinks of you, that you think little about. There's Betty, and Janet, and me; and we're all as anxious about you as if you were a sister of our own;—but to be a

sailor's wife; to be just like one of the wives in Anster; to marry a common man—oh Katie, could you do it?"

"He's no a common man," said Katie, raising her face, which was now deeply flushed; "he has as pleasant a smile as speaks as soft and as gentle, and his courtesie—it's no bowing I mean—naething—as weel as—"

"As whom?"

Sir Alexander! Again the name almost on her lip, but Katie recalled herself in time.

"As weel as ony grand gentler. And if he was a lord he would be better than he is, being plain Willie Morison!"

Nae better! You think so just as little Katie, in your flush of affectation pride; you did not quite think so when you first awoke to the perception that you were no longer free, no longer mistress of yourself; nor even now, sometimes the one of your old splendid dreams comes across your imagination, and you remember that your hero is the mate of the want schooner, and not a bold Barons belted Earl.

"Lady Anne told me this morning that I was helping to dress her," said Bauby Rodger, stealing into the west room, "but Lady Anne was absent;—" but he said, "Katie, it's no true?"

Katie beat impatiently with her fingers upon the table, and made no answer.

"Do you mean to tell me it's true?"

"What for should it no be true, Bauby?" exclaimed the little beauty.

"Eh, Miss Katie, the like of you, you'll repent and change your mind as a'! I'll no deny he's a bonny lad; but wasna him, I reckon, Miss Katie, that sent ye the white roses yon time?"

Katie's cheeks flushed indignantly.

"It's no my blame folk sending them. I took the flowers just because they were bonnie, and no for ony body's sake. Nae way to ken wha sent them—and nae right to cast it up to me, Bauby Rodger."

"Me cast it up to ye, my bonnie Bauby. If I turn on ye, that have had ye under my hands maist a' your days, maist a' your very mother, ye might weel maist a' the world; but tell me ance for a' true?"

Bauby had a great quantity of very red hair, which her little plaid tied—a piece of extravagance which

Lady Erskine did not fail to notice—with two inches of narrow blue ribbon, was quite insufficient to keep in duress. One thick lock at this moment lay prone on Bauby's shoulder, as she leaned her great elbows on the table, and bending forward, looked earnestly into Katie Stewart's face.

Katie made no reply. She only cast down her eyes, and curiously examined the corner of her apron; but, at last, suddenly springing up, she seized Bauby's stray tress, pulled it lustily, and ran off laughing to her embroidery frame.

"Weel, weel," said Bauby Rodger, untying her scrap of blue ribbon to enable her slowly to replace the fugitive lock—"weel, weel, whaever gets ye will get a handful. Be he lord or be he loon, he'll no hae his sorrow to seek!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE long winter glided away—there was nothing in it to mark or diversify its progress. Lady Anne Erskine saw a little more company—was sometimes with her sister Lady Janet, and for one New Year week in Edinburgh with Lady Betty; but nothing else checkered the quiet current of Katie Stewart's life. Janet was married—for Alick Morison's ship sailed to "the gaest country"—that is, the Baltic—and took a long rest at home all the winter. And in the Milton Mrs. Stewart was sedulously preparing—her objections all melting into an occasional grumble under the kindly logic of Isabell—for another wedding. The inexhaustible oak press, out of whose scarcely diminished stores had come the "providing" of Isabell and Janet, was now replenished with snowy linen and mighty blankets for Katie's; and in the pleasant month of April, Willie Morison was expected home.

These April days had come—soft, genial, hopeful days—and Katie sat in the kitchen of the Milton, working at some articles of her own *trousseau*, when a sailor's wife from Anstruther knocked at the open door—a preliminary knock, not to ask admittance, but to intimate that she was about to enter.

"I've brought ye a letter, Miss Katie," said Nancy Tod. "The ship's in this morning afore daylight, and the captain

sent aff my man in a boat to carry the news to his wife at the Elie; so the mate gi'ed Jamie this letter for you."

Katie had already seized the letter, and was away with it to the further window, where she could read it undisturbed. It was the first letter she had ever received, except from Lady Anne—the first token from Willie Morison since he waved his cap to her from the yards of the schooner, as it glided past the Billy Ness.

"Jamie came hame in the dead o' the night," said the sailor's wife, "and he's gi'en me sic a fright wi' what he heard at the Elie, that I am no like mysel since syne; for ye ken there's a king's boat, a wee evil spirit o' a cutter, lying in the Firth, and it's come on nae ither errand but to press our men. Ane disna ken what nicht they may come ashore and hunt the town; and there's a guid wheen men the noo about Aest and Wast Anster, no to speak o' Sillerdyke and Pittenweem. I'm sure if there ever was a bitter ill and misfortune on this earth, it's that weary press-gang."

"Nae doubt, Nancy," said Mrs. Stewart, with the comfortable sympathy of one to whom a kindred calamity was not possible; "but ye see Alick Morrison, Janet's man, is a mate like his brother—and it's a guid big brig he's in, too—so we're no in ony danger oursel; though, to be sure, that's just a' the mair reason why we should feel for you."

"Ane never kens when ane is safe," said Nancy, shaking her head; "the very mates, ay, and captains too, nae less, are pressed just as soon as a common man afore the mast when they're out o' employ or ashore, my Jamie says; and muckle care seafaring men have to take nowadays, skulking into their ain houses likes thieves in the night. It's an awful hard case, Mrs. Stewart. I'm sure if the king or the parliament men could just see the housefu' o' bairns my man has to work for, and kent how muckle toil it takes to feed them and clead them, no to speak o' schulin', it wadna be in their hearts to take a decent head of a house away frae his family in sic a manner. Mony a was thought it gi'es me—mony a time I wauken out o' my sleep wi' wat cheeks, dreaming Jamie's pressed, and the bairns a' greetin' about me, and their faither away to meet men as faes that never did harm to us, and wi' far waur than the natural dangers o' the sea to suffer frae."

It's nae easy or licht weird being a sailor's wife in thir times."

Katie, her letter already devoured, had stolen back to her seat with glowing cheeks and bright eyes; and Katie, in that delight of welcome which made the partings look like trifles, was not disposed to grant this proposition.

"Is it ony want than being a landman's, Nancy?" she asked, glancing up from her work.

"Eh, Miss Katie, it's little the like o' you ken—it's little young lassies ken, or new-married wives either, that are a' richt if their man's richt. I have as muckle regard for Jamie as woman need to have, and he's weel wurdy o't; but I've left aye in the cradle at hame, and three at their faither's fit, that canna do a hand's turn for theirsels, puir innocents, nor will this mony a year—let-abeen Lizzie, that can do grand about a house already, and will sune be fit for service, it's my hope; and Tam, that's a muckle laddie, and should be band to some trade. What would come o' them a', if the faither was ta'en frae their head like Archie Davidson, no to be heard o' for maybe ten or twenty years? Ye dinna ken—ye ken naething about it, you young things; it's different wi' the like o' me."

"Take hame a wheen bannocks with ye to the bairns, Nancy," said Mrs. Stewart, taking a great basket of barley-meal and wheaten cakes from the aumrie.

"Mony thanks, mistress," said Nancy, with great good-will lifting her blue checked apron—"ye're just owre guid. It's no often wheat bread crosses my lips, and yestreen I wad hae been thankful of a morsel to make meat to wee Geordie: but the siller rins scant sune enough, without wasting it on guid things to oursel. Mony thanks, and guid day, and I'm muckle obliged to ye."

"Willie's to be hame the night, mother," said Katie in a half whisper, as Nancy left the door with her well-filled apron.

"The night! He'll have sent nae word hame, I'll warrant. How is he to win away frae the ship sae soon?"

"The captain's wife's gaun up from the Elie—he'll no need to gang down himself: and Willie's to cross the Firth after dark, a' for fear of that weary press-gang."

"Weel, weel, it can do nae ill to us—be thankful," said Mrs. Stewart.

And that same night, when the soft April moon, still young and half formed,

reflected its silver bow in the quiet firth, strangely contrasting its peaceful light with the lurid torch on the May, Willie Morrison stood on the little bridge before the mill, by Katie Stewart's side.

All these six long months they had never seen, never heard of each other; so strange it is now, how they have known each the mind and heart of each. When they parted, Katie was still shy of her betrothed; now it is not so; and they sit together under the moonlight with a familiar confidence, unhesitating, restrained, at which Katie herself sometimes starts and wonders.

But now the lamp is lighted, and there are loud and frequent calls to Willie. Old Mrs. Morrison, his wife's mother, occupies John Stewart's easy chair, and Alick and Janet wheel a circle round the fire; for winter or summer the cheerful fireside is the heart's centre, though, in deference to the pleasant April weather, the door stands open, and the voice of the burn joins pleasantly with the human voices, and a beam of moonlight inlays the threshold with silver. And now little Katie steals a secret blushes, and eyes full of dew, which are so dazzled by the light of the interior that she has to shade them with her hand; and, standing under cover of that great figure which she has constrained to enter before, and sitting down in the corner, withdrawn from the light as far as may be, draws her side her little wheel.

"Weel, ye see, I saw our own morning," said Willie, looking round and addressing in general the interested company, while Katie span demurely the aspect of an initiated person who knew it all, and did not need to be told—"and they have a new brig building at Leith, that's to be ca'd the *Fair of Fife*. Mr. Mitchell the chief owner, a St. Andrews man himself—so he said. I would be content to be maybe six or twa months ashore out of employment, would ship me master of the brig whenever she was ready for sea."

"Out of employ!" exclaimed Alick in consternation.

"I ken what ye mean, Alick, but fear of that. So I told the owner I had my ain reasons for wanting twa weeks to mysel, ashore, the noo, and I would take his offer and thank him. We shook hands on the bargain, and

may ca' me Captain, mother, whenever ye like."

"Ay, but no till the cutter's captain gies us leave," said Alick, hastily. "What glamour was owre ye, that ye could pit yourself in such peril? better sail mate for a dizzen voyages mair, than be pressed for a common Jack in a man-o'-war."

"Nae fear of us," said Willie, gayly. "Never venture, never win, Alick; and ye'll have a' to cross to Leith before we sail, and see the Flower of Fife. I should take Katie with me the first voyage, and then there would be twa of them, miller."

"But, Willie, my man, ye've pitten yoursel in peril," said his mother, laying her feeble hand upon his arm.

"Ne'er a bit, mother—ne'er a bit. The cutter has dune nae mischief yet—she's neither stopped a ship nor sent a boat ashore. If she begins to show her teeth, we'll hear her snarl in time, and I'll away in to Cupar, or west to Dunfermline; nae fear of me—we'll keep a look-out on the Firth, and nae harm will come near us."

"If there was nae ither safeguard but your look-out on the Firth, wae me!" said his mother; "but ye're the son of a righteous man, Willie Morison, and ane of the props of a widow. The Lord preserve ye—for I see ye'll hae muckle need."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day was the Sabbath, and Willie Morison, with his old mother leaning on his arm, reverently deposited his silver half-crown in the plate at the door of West Anster Church, an offering of thankfulness, for the parish poor. There had been various returns during the previous week; a brig from the Levant, and another from Riga—where, with its cargo of hemp, it had been frozen in all the winter—had brought home each their proportion of welcome family fathers, and young sailor men, like Willie Morison himself, to glad the eyes of friends and kindred. One of these was the son of that venerable elder in the lateran, who rose to read the little notes which the thank-givers had handed to him at the door; and Katie Stewart's eyes filled as the old man's slow voice, somewhat moved by reading his son's name just before, intimated to the waiting congregation before him,

and to the minister in the pulpit behind, also waiting to include all these in his concluding prayer; that William Morison gave thanks for his safe return.

And then there came friendly greetings as the congregation streamed out through the church-yard, and the soft hopeful sunshine of spring threw down a bright flickering network of light and shade through the soft foliage on the causewayed street;—peaceful people going to secure and quiet homes—families joyfully encircling the fathers or brothers for whose return they had just rendered thanks out of full hearts, and peace upon all and over all, as broad as the skies, and as calm.

But as the stream of people pours again in the afternoon from the two neighbor churches, what is this gradual excitement which manifests itself among them? Hark! there is the boom of a gun plunging into all the echoes; and crowds of mothers and sisters cling about these young sailors, and almost struggle with them, to hurry them home. Who is that hastening to the pier, with his staff clenched in his hand, and his white "haffit locks" streaming behind him? It is the reverend elder who to-day returned thanks for his restored son. The sight of him—the sound of that second gun pealing from the Firth puts the climax on the excitement of the people, and now, in a continuous stream from the peaceful church-yard gates, they flow toward the pier and the sea.

Eagerly running along by the edge of the rocks, at a pace which, on another Sabbath, she would have thought a desecration of the day, clinging to Willie Morison's arm, and with an anxious heart, feeling her presence a kind of protection to him, Katie Stewart hastens to the Billy Ness. The gray pier of Anster is lined with anxious faces, and here and there a leveled telescope under the care of some old shipmaster attracts round it a still deeper, still more eager, knot of spectators. The tide is out, and venturous lads are stealing along the sharp low ranges of rock, slipping now and then with incautious steps into the little clear pools of sea-water which surround them; for their eyes are not on their own uncertain footing, but fixed, like the rest, on that visible danger up the Firth, in which all feel themselves concerned.

Already there are spectators, and another telescope on the Billy Ness, and the

whole range of "the braes" between Anstruther and Pittenweem is dotted with anxious lookers-on; and the far away pier of Pittenweem, too, is dark with its little crowd.

What is the cause? Not far from the shore, just where that headland, which hides you from the deep indentation of Largo Bay, juts out upon the Firth, lies a little vessel, looking like a diminutive Arabian horse, or one of the aristocratic young slight lads who are its officers, with high blood, training and courage in every tight line of its cordage, and taper stretch of its masts. Before it, arrested in its way lies a helpless merchant brig, softly swaying on the bright mid-waters of the Firth, with the cutter's boat rapidly approaching its side.

Another moment and it is boarded; a very short interval of silence, and again the officer—you can distinguish him with that telescope, by his cocked hat, and the flash which the scabbard of his sword throws on the water as he descends the vessel's side—has re-entered the cutter's boat. Heavily the boat moves through the water now, crowded with pressed men—poor writhing hearts, whose hopes of home-coming and peace have been blighted in a moment; captured, some of them, in sight of their homes, and under the anxious, straining eyes of wives and children, happily too far off to discern their full calamity.

A low moan comes from the lips of that poor woman, who, wringing her hands and rocking herself to and fro, with the unconscious movement of extreme pain, looks pitifully in Willie Morison's face, as he fixes the telescope on the scene. She is reading the changes of its expression, as if her sentence was there; but he says nothing, though the very motion of his hand, as he steadies the glass, attracts, like something of occult significance, the agonized gaze which dwells upon him.

"Captain, captain!" she cried, at last, softly pulling his coat, and with unconscious art using the new title: "Captain, isn't the Traveler? Can ye make her out? She has a white figure-head at her bows, and twa white lines round her side. Captain, captain! tell me for pity's sake!"

Another long keen look was bent on the brig, as slowly and disconsolately she resumed her onward way.

"No, Peggie," said the young sailor, looking round to meet her eye, and to com-

fort his companion, who stood trembling by his side: "No, Peggie—make ye easy; it's no the Traveler."

The poor woman seated herself on the grass, and, supporting her head on her hands, wiped from her pale cheek tears of relief and thankfulness.

"God be thanked! and oh! God! for thae poor creatures, and their wives in their little anes. I think I have the kindest heart in a' the world, that can be so when there's such misery in sight."

But dry your tears, poor Peggie! Linger—brace up your trembling heart for another fiery trial; for here comes another white sail peacefully gliding up the Firth, with a flag fluttering from the mast, and a white figure-head dashing sea spray, which seems to embrace it just as the sailors think, as out of stormy seas, nears the welcome home. With a step the captain walks the little gun deck—with light hearts the seamen are amidship, looking forth on the green face of Fife. Dark grows the young sailor's face as he watches the unsuspicious tim glide triumphantly up through the blue water into the undreaded main; a glance round, a slight contraction of those lines in his face which Katie Stewart, eagerly watching him, has never so strongly marked before, tells the wife on the grass enough to make her hysterically strong, and with her eyes might gaze at the advancing ship—alas! one can doubt its identity. The white lines on its side—the white figure-head among the joyous spray—the Traveler dashes on, out of its prison in the northern harbor—out of its stormy ocean voyage—homeward bound.

Homeward bound! There is no longer turning longing looks to Anstruther harbor as the ship sails past; no putting up in the colored foreign boats those little wooden toys which amuse the leisure during the long dark winter of the ice, and thinking with involuntary smiles how his little ones will leap as he divides the store. Put the good seaman, gentle father!—the little ones will be men and women before he look on them again.

For already the echoes are started from the women here on shore shiver and wring their hands as the cutter's gun rings its mandate to the passenger; and looking up the Firth you see nothing but a rolling globe of white smoke, slowly break-

into long streamers, and almost entirely concealing the fine outline of the little ship of war. The challenged brig at first is doubtful—the alarmed captain does not understand the summons; but again another flash, another report, another cloud of white smoke, and the Traveler is brought to.

There are no tears on Peggie Rodger's haggard cheeks, but a convulsive shudder passes over her now and then, as, with intense strained eyes, she watches the cutter's boat as it crosses the Firth toward the arrested brig.

"God! an' it were sunk like lead!" said a passionate voice beside her, trembling with the desperate restraint of impotent strength.

"God help us!—God help us!—cursena them," said the poor woman with a hysterical sob. "Oh, captain, captain! gie me the glass; if they pit him in the boat I'll ken Davie—if naeboddy else would, I can gie me the glass."

He gave her the glass, and himself gladly turned away, trembling with the same suppressed rage and indignation which had dictated the other spectator's curse.

"If ane could but warn them wi' a word groaned Willie Morison, grinding his teeth—"if ane could but lift a finger! but to see them gang into the snare like innocents in the broad day—Katie, it's enough to pit a man mad!"

But Katie's pitiful compassionate eyes were fixed on Peggie Rodger—on her white hollow cheeks, and on the convulsive steadiness with which she held the telescope in her hand.

"It's a fair wind into the Firth—there's another brig due. Katie, I canna stand and see this mair!"

He drew her hand through his arm, and unconsciously grasping it with a force which at another time would have made her cry with pain, led her a little way back toward the town. But the fascination of the scene was too great for him, painful as it was, and far away on the horizon glimmered another sail.

"Willie!" exclaimed Katie Stewart, "gar some of the Sillardyke men gang out wi' a boat—gar them row down by the coast, and then strike out in the Firth, and warn the men."

He grasped her hand again, not so violently. "Bless you, lassie! and wha should do your bidding but myself? but take care of yourself, Katie Stewart.

What care I for a' the brigs in the world if any thing ails you? Gang hame, or—"

"I'll no stir a fit till you're safe back again. I'll never speak to ye mair if ye say anither word. Be canny—be canny—but haste ye away."

Another moment and Katie Stewart stands alone by Peggie Rodger's side, watching the eager face which seems to grow old and emaciated with this terrible vigil, as if these moments were years; while the ground flies under the bounding feet of Willie Morison, and he answers the questions which are addressed to him, as to his errand, only while himself continues at full speed to push eastward to Cellardyke.

And the indistinct words which he calls back to his comrades, as he "devours the way," are enough to send racing after him an eager train of coadjutors; and with his bonnet off, and his hands, which tremble as with palsy, clasped convulsively together the white-haired Elder leans upon the wall of the pier, and bids God bless them, God speed them, with a broken voice, whose utterance comes in gasps and sobs; for he has yet another son upon the sea.

Meanwhile the cutter's boat has returned from the Traveler with its second load; and a kind bystander relieves the aching arms of poor Peggie Rodger of the telescope in which now she has no further interest.

"Gude kens—Gude kens," said the poor woman slowly, as Katie strove to comfort her. "I didna see him in the boat; but ane could see nothing but the wet oars flashing out of the water, and blinding folks e'en. What am I to do? Miss Katie, what am I to think? They maun have left some men in the ship to work her. Oh! God grant they have ta'en the young men, and no heads of families wi' bairns to toil for. But Davie's a buirdly man, just like ane to take an officer's ee. Oh, the Lord help us! for I'm just distraught, and kenna what to do."

A faint cheer, instantly suppressed, rises from the point of the pier and the shelving coast beyond; and yonder now it glides along the shore, with wet oars gleaming out of the dazzling sunny water, the boat of the forlorn hope. A small, picked, chosen company bend to the oars, and Willie Morison is at the helm, warily guiding the

little vessel over the rocks, as they shelter themselves in the shadow of the coast. On the horizon the coming sail flutters nearer, nearer—and up the Firth yonder there is a stir in the cutter as she prepares to leave her anchor and strike into the mid-waters of the broad highway which she molests.

The sun is sinking lower in the grand western skies, and beginning to cast long, cool, dewy shadows of every headland and little promontory over the whole rocky coast; but still the Firth is burning with his slanting fervid rays, and Inchkeith far away lies like a cloud upon the sea, and the May, near at hand, lifts its white front to the sun—a Sabbath night as calm and full of rest as ever natural Sabbath was—and the reverend Elder yonder on the pier uncovers his white head once more, and groans within himself, amid his passionate prayers for these periled men upon the sea, over the desecrated Sabbath day.

Nearer and nearer wears the sail, fluttering like the snowy breast of some seabird in prophetic terror; and now far off the red fishing-boat strikes boldly forth into the Firth with a signal flag at its prow.

In the cutter they perceive it now; and see how the anchor swings up her shapely side, and the snowy sail curls over the yards, as with a bound she darts forth from her lurking-place, and flashing in the sunshine like an eager hound, leaps forth after her prey.

The boat—the boat! With every gleam of its oars the hearts throb that watch it on its way; with every bound it makes there are prayers—prayers of the anguish which will take no discouragement—pressing in at the gates of heaven; and the ebbing tide bears it out, and the wind droops its wings, and falls becalmed upon the coast, as if repenting it of the evil service it did to those two hapless vessels which have fallen into the snare. Bravely on as the sun grows lower—bravely out as the fluttering stranger sail draws nearer and more near—and but one other strain will bring them within hail.

But as all eyes follow these adventurers, another flash from the cutter's side glares over the shining water; and as the smoke rolls over the pursuing vessel, and the loud report again disturbs all the hills, Katie's heart grows sick, and she scarcely dares look to the east. But the ball has plowed the water harmlessly, and yonder is the boat of rescue—yonder is the ship within

hail; and some one stands up in the prow of the forlorn hope, and shouts at wave his hand.

It is enough. "There she goes—she tacks!" cries exulting the man with the telescope, "and in half-an-hour she is safe in St. Andrews Bay."

But she sails slowly back—and sails the impatient cutter, with little time to swell her sails, and that little time is gone; while the fisherboat, again close inshore with a relay of fresh crews in the oars, has the advantage of them.

And now there is a hot pursuit—the cutter's boat in full chase after the forlorn hope; but as the sun disappears, long shadows lengthen and creep into the creeks and bays of the rocky coast—known to the pursued, so ill to the pursuer—the event of the race is soon decided. Clambering up the first accessible place they can gain, and leaving the rocks behind them, the forlorn hope joyously make their way home.

"And it's a' Katie's notice that morsel of mine," says the proud Morison. But alas for your stout Willie!—alas for the tremulous seabird which beats against the breast of little Katie Stewart!—she knows what heavy shadows shall end of this Sabbath-day.

CHAPTER XX.

THE mild spring night has darkened it is still early, and the moon is rising. The worship is over in John's decent house, and all is still within the miller and his wife still sit by the "gathered" fire, and talk in half words about the events of the day, and prospects of "the bairns." It is scarcely yet, but it is the reverent usage of the family to shut out the world even usual on the Sabbath; and Katie's consideration of her fatigue, has been dismissed to her little chamber in the mill. She has gone away not unwillingly—just before, the miller had closed the door on the slow, reluctant, departing Willie Morison, and Katie is left alone.

Very small is this chamber in the house of the Milton, which Janet and Willie used to share. She has set down a candle on the little table before the

glass in the dark carved frame, and herself stands by the window, which she has opened, looking out. The rush of the burn fills the soft air with sound, into which sometimes penetrates a far-off voice, which proclaims the little town still awake and stirring: but save the light from Robert Moulter's uncurtained window—revealing a dark gleaming link of the burn, before the cot-house door—and the reddened sky yonder, reflecting that fierce torch on the May, there is nothing visible but the dark line of fields, and a few faint stars in the clouded sky.

But the houses in Anster are not yet closed or silent. In the street which leads past the town-house and church of West Anster to the shore, you can see a ruddy light streaming out from the window upon the causeway, the dark church-yard wall, and overhanging trees. At the fire stands a comely young woman, lifting "a kettle of potatoes" from the crook. The "kettle" is a capacious pot on three feet, formed not like the ordinary "kail-pat," but like a little tub of iron; and now, as it is set down before the ruddy fire, you see it is full of laughing potatoes, disclosing themselves, snow-white and mealy, through the cracks in their clear dark coats. The mother of the household sits by the fireside, with a volume of sermons in her hand; but she is paying but little attention to the book, for the kitchen is full of young sailors, eagerly discussing the events of the day, and through the hospitable open door others are entering and departing, with friendly salutations. Another such animated company fills the house of the widow Morison, "aest the town," for still the afternoon's excitement has not subsided.

But up this dark leaf-shadowed street, in which we stand, there comes a muffled tramp, as of stealthy footsteps. They hear nothing of it in that bright warm kitchen—fear nothing, as they gather round the fire, and sometimes rise so loud in their conversation that the house-mother lifts her hand, and shakes her head, with an admonitory, "Whisht bairns; mind, it's the Sabbath-day."

Behind backs, leaning against the sparkling panes of the window, young Robert Davidson speaks aside to Lizzie Tosh, the daughter of the house. They were "cried" to-day in West Anster kirk, and soon will have a blithe bridal—"If naething comes in the way," says Lizzie, with her down-

cast face; and the manly young sailor answers. "Nae fear."

"Nae fear!" But without, the stealthy steps come nearer; and if you draw far enough away from the open door to lose the merry voices, and have your eyes no longer dazzled with the light, you will see dim figures creeping through the darkness, and feel that the air is heavy with the breath of men. But few people care to use that dark road between the manse and the church-yard at night, so no one challenges the advancing party, or gives the alarm.

Lizzie Tosh has stolen to the door: it is to see if the moon is up, and if Robert will have light on his homeward walk to Pittenweem; but immediately she rushes in again, with a face as pale as it had before been blooming, and alarms the assembly. "A band of the cutter's men;—an officer, with a sword at his side. Rin, lads, rin, afore they reach the door."

But there is a keen, eager face, with a cocked hat surmounting it, already looking in at the window. The assembled sailors make a wild plunge at the door; and while a few escape under cover of the darkness, the cutter's men have secured, after a desperate resistance, three or four of the foremost. Poor fellows! You see them stand without, young Robert Davidson in the front, his broad, bronzed forehead bleeding from a cut he has received in the scuffle, and one of his captors, still more visibly wounded, looking on him with evil, revengeful eyes: his own eye, poor lad, is flaming with fierce indignation and rage, and his broad breast heaves almost convulsively. But now he catches a glimpse of the weeping Lizzie, and fiery tears, which scorch his eyelids, blind him for a moment, and his heart swells as if it would burst. But it does not burst, poor desperate heart! until the appointed bullet shall come, a year or two hence, to make its pulses quiet forever.

A few of the gang entered the house. It is only "a but and a ben;" and Lizzie stands with her back against the door of the inner apartment, while her streaming eyes now and then cast a sick, yearning glance toward the prisoners at the door—for her brother stands there as well as her betrothed.

"What for would you seek in there?" asked the mother, lifting up her trembling hands. "What would ye despoil my chaumer for, after ye've made my hearth-

stane desolate. If ye've a license to steal men, ye've nane to steal gear. Ye've dune your warst: gang out o' my house ye thieves, ye locusts, ye—"

"We'll see about that, old lady," said the leader;—"put the girl away from that door. Tom, bring the lantern."

The little humble room was neatly arranged. It was their best, and they had not spared upon it what ornament they could attain. Shells far traveled, precious for the giver's sake, and many other heterogeneous trifles, such as sailors pick up in foreign parts, were arranged upon the little mantle-piece and grate. There was no nook or corner in it which could possibly be used for a hiding-place; but the experienced eye of the foremost man saw the homely counterpane disordered on the bed; and there indeed the mother had hid her youngest, dearest son. She had scarcely a minute's time to drag him in, to prevail upon him to let her conceal him under her feather bed, and all its comfortable coverings. But the mother's pains were unavailing; and now she stood by, and looked on with a suppressed scream, while that heavy blow struck down her boy as he struggled—her youngest, fair-haired, hopeful boy.

Calm thoughts are in your heart, Katie Stewart—dreams of sailing over silver seas under that moon which begins to rise, slowly climbing through the clouds yonder, on the south side of the Firth. In fancy, already, you watch the soft Mediterranean waves, rippling past the side of the Flower of Fife, and see the strange beautiful countries of which your bridegroom has told you shining under the brilliant southern sun. And then the home-coming—the curious toys you will gather yonder for the sisters and the mother; the pride you will have in telling them how Willie has cared for your voyage—how wisely he rules the one Flower of Fife, how tenderly he guards the other.

Your heart is touched, Katie Stewart, touched with the calm and pathos of great joy; and tears lie under your eyelashes, like the dew on flowers. Clasp your white hands on the sill of the window—heed not that your knees are unbended—and say your child's prayers with lips which move but utter nothing audible, and with your head bowed under the moonbeam, which steals into your window like a bird. True, you have said these child's prayers many a night, as in some sort a charm, to guard

you as you slept; but now there comes upon your spirit an awe of the great Father yonder, a dim and wonderful apprehension of the mysterious Son in whose name you make those prayers. Is it true, then, that He thinks of all our loves and sorrows, this One, whose visible form realizes to us the dim, grand, glorious heaven—knows us by name—remembers us with the God's love in his wonderful human heart;—as scattered by myriads over his earth, like the motes in the sunbeam? And the tears steal over your cheeks, as you end the child's prayer with the name that is above all names.

Now, will you rest? But the moon has mastered all her hilly way of clouds, and from the full sky looks down on you, Katie, with eyes of pensive blessedness like your own. Tarry a little—linger to watch that one bright spot on the Firth, where you could almost count the silver waves as they lie beneath the light.

But a rude sound breaks upon the stillness—a sound of flying feet echoing over the quiet road; and now they become visible—one figure in advance, and a band of pursuers behind—the same brave heart which spent its strength to-day to warn the unconscious ship—the same strong form which Katie has seen in her dreams on the quarter-deck of the Flower of Fife;—but he will never reach that quarter-deck, Katie Stewart, for his strength flags, and they gain upon him.

Gain upon him, step by step, unpitiful bloodhounds!—see him lift up his hands to you, at your window, and have no ruth for his young hope, or yours;—and now their hands are on his shoulder, and he is in their power.

"Katie!" cries the hoarse voice of Willie Morrison, breaking the strange fascination in which she stood, "come down and speak to me as word, if ye wouldna break my heart. Man—if ye are a man—let me bide a minute; let me say a word to her. I'll maybe never see her in this world again."

The miller stood at the open door—the mother within was wiping the tears from her cheeks. "Oh Katie, bairn, that ye had been sleeping!" But Katie rushed past them, and crossed the burn.

What can they say?—only convulsively grasp each other's hands—woefully look into each other's faces, ghastly in the moonlight; till Willie—Willie, who cou'd

have carried her like a child, in his strength of manhood—bowed down his head into those little hands of hers which are lost in his own vehement grasp, and hides with them his passionate tears.

"Willie, I'll never forget ye," says aloud the instinctive impulse of little Katie's heart, forgetting for the moment that there is any grief in the world but to see his. "Night and day I'll mind ye, think of ye. If ye were twenty years away, I would be blither to wait for ye, than to be a queen. Willie, if ye must go, go with a stout heart—for I'll never forget ye, if it should be twenty years!"

Twenty years! Only eighteen have you been in the world yet, brave little Katie Stewart; and you know not the years, how they drag their drooping skirts over the hills, when hearts long for their ending, or how it is only day by day, hour by hour, that they wear out at length, and fade into the past.

"Now, my man, let's have no more of this," said the leader of the gang. I'm not here to wait your leisure; come on."

And now they are away—truly away—and the darkness settles down where this moment Katie saw her bridegroom's head bowing over the hands which still are wet with his tears. Twenty years! Her own words ring into her heart like a knell, a prophecy of evil—if he should be twenty years away!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE cutter is no longer visible in the Firth. Ensconced beyond the shadow of Inchkeith, she lies guarding the port of Leith, and boarding ship after ship; but the bereaved families in Anster, awaking on this sad morrow to remember their desolation, have not even the poor comfort of seeing the vessel into which their sons have been taken.

By six o'clock poor Katie Stewart sadly crosses the dewy fields to the Billy Ness, straining her eyes to see the cutter; before her is another anxious gazer, a woman equipped for a journey, with shoes and stockings in her checked apron, and the tartan plaid which covers her shoulders loosely laid up like a hood, round her clean cap. It is Peggie Rodger.

"I canna rest, Miss Katie," said the

sailor's wife—"I maun ken the warst. My auldest's a guid length; she can take care o' the little anes till, guid news or ill news, I win back. I've never closed an e'e this night; and afore anither comes, if it binna o'therwise ordained, I'll ken if Davie's in the brig or no. Eh! Miss Katie! where were my een when I didna see mair folk than me have sleepit nane this weary night?—and the Lord have pity on ye, lassie, for ye're a young thing to mell wi' trouble."

"If ye'll come with me to the Milton, Peggie," said Katie, "and break your fast—I'm gaun to Kellie, and it's the same road, for twa or three miles."

"I've three-and-twenty mile afore me this day," said Peggie Rodger, "and when I stand still for a moment I feel mysel shake and trem'le, like that grass on the tap o' the rock: but I'll wait for ye if ye're gaun on the road, Miss Katie—only ye maunna tarry, and ye wadna be for starting sae early. You're young yet, and so's he—and there's nane but your twa sels. Keep up a guid heart, and dinna look sae white and wae, like a guid bairn."

But Katie made no reply to the intended consolation; and after another wistful look up the Firth, the two anxious hearts turned back together toward the Milton. The end of Peggie's apron was tucked over her arm, and in the other hand she carried her bundle, while her bare feet brushed the dew from the grass; but along flinty highways, as well as over the soft turf and glistening sea-sand, must these weary feet travel before their journey's end.

A hurried morsel both of them swallowed, in obedience to Mrs. Stewart's entreaties, though Katie turned from the spread table with sickness of the body as well as of the heart. Strangely changed, too, was Mrs. Stewart's manner; and as she adjusts the graceful little mantle which now may hang as it will for any care of Katie's, and stoops down to wipe some imaginary dust from the silver buckles in those handsome shoes, and lingers with kind hand about her sorrowful child, touching her gently, and with wistful eyes looking into her face, no one could recognize the despot of the Milton in this tender, gentle mother. Poor little Katie! these cares and silent sympathies overwhelm her, and after she has reached the door, she turns back to hide her

head on her mother's shoulder, and find relief in tears.

"Ye'll tell Bauby, Miss Katie?" said Peggie Rodger, stealthily lifting her hand to her eyes to brush off a tear which in the silence, as they walk along together toward Pittenweem, has stolen down her cheek. "I sent her word that Davie was expected in, and she was to ask away a day and come down to see us. Weel, weel, it was to be otherwise. Ye'll tell her, Miss Katie?"

"But you dinna ken certain, Peggie. Maybe he's no among the pressed men, after a'."

Peggie shook her head, and stooped to bring the corner of her apron over her wet cheek. "If he had been an auld man, or a weakly man, or ony thing but the weel-faured, honest-like lad he is, Gude help me! I would have maist been glad; but afore he was married, Miss Katie, they ca'ed him, for a by-name, bonnie Davie Steele; and weel do I ken that an officer that kent what a purpose-like seaman was, would never pass owre my man. Na, na! they're owre well skilled in their trade."

Poor Peggie Rodger! Her eyes glistened under her tears with sad, affectionate pride; and Katie turned away her head too, to weep unseen for her handsome, manly Willie. In his vigorous youth, and with his superior capabilities of service, what chance or hope that they would ever let him go?

They parted near the fishing village of St. Monance, where the inland road, ascending toward Kellie, parted from the highway along the coast. The sailor's wife lingered behind as Katie left her—for they parted just beside a little wayside inn, into which Peggie for a moment disappeared. All the money she could muster was tightly tied up in a leathern purse, and hidden in her breast—for the use of Davie, if he needed it—leaving but a few pence in her hand. But there was still some twenty miles to go, and Peggie felt that even her anxiety, strong as it was, could not suffice alone to support her frame.

In her lap, wrapt in her handkerchief, she carries a round wheaten bannock, which Mrs. Stewart forced upon her as she left the Milton; and Peggie's errand now is to get a very small measure of whiskey—the universal strengthener—and pour it into the bannock, "to keep

her heart," as she says, on the way; for Peggie's health is not robust, and great is the fatigue before her.

From the Milton it is full five miles: Kellie, and, under the warm sun, for in her grief grows weary and jaded, the girlish immature frame can not be so much as the elder one—and grew new to her: not even the sober, stern grief of ordinary life has ever clouded her—much less such a fever as this.

"Eh, Katie Stewart, my bonnie! wha's meddled wi' ye?" exclaimed Mrs. Rodger, as, coming down the long road from the castle, she met her half-sister. "What's happened to ye, lass?—have a face as white as snow. Peggie, what's wrang?"

But the light was reeling in Katie's eyes, and the sick heart brought over her a "dwaum" of fire. She staggered forward into Bauby's arms.

"My bairn!—my darling!—sit ye, Katie Stewart?"

For in her grief she had lost the self-command which was still new to her, and, like a child, was weeping aloud, sobs and tears which could no longer be restrained.

"Oh, Bauby!—it's Willie Morison! He's pressed, and away on the cutter's boat, and I'll never see him again."

The good Bauby pillowed the pretty head on her breast, and, with her gentle, caressing hand, were those great hands, in one of which she could have carried the little man. "Whisht, my bairn! Whisht, my ling!" With kindly tact, she tried more decided consolation.

"But he's pressed, Bauby—he's pressed—puir Willie!—and I'll never see him again."

"Whisht, whisht," said the comforter, "ye'll see him yet mony a merry day. Ye're but a bairn, and it's the first time but a pressed man's no dead man. I was born in a sailor's house myself, and I ken."

Katie lifted up her head, and dried her tears.

"Did ye ever ken any of them come back, Bauby?"

"Come back? Bless the bairn! without doubt, as sure as they gae out. Wasna there Tammas Hugh Carnegie wi' a pension, and Archie Davidson—a gunner, and might get, if he was. And just last New Year—nae mair gae—young John Plenderleath, or the

Kirkton of Largo. The bairn's in a creel! what should aill them to come back?"

"But they werena pressed, Bauby," said Katie, as she put back the hair from her cheeks, and brushed off the tear which hung upon her eyelash.

"And what's about that? There's been few pressed hereaway yet—but they were a' in men-o'-war, and that's just the same. Nae doubt they come back. And now, keep up your heart like a good bairn, and tell me a' hoo it was."

And Bauby led her back to the castle like a child, soothing and cheering her with the true instinct and wonderful skill of love; for her little nurling—her wayward, capricious, willful charge—was the light of Bauby Rodger's eyes.

"And bonnie Davie Steele—canty Davie Steele!" exclaimed Bauby. "Wae's me! hae they taen him, too? And what's puir Peggie to do wi' a' thae little anes? Little kent I what wark was on the Firth when I was wishing ye here yestreen, Miss Katie, to see what a bonnie night; but we dinna ken a step afore us, puir, frail mortals as we are! Weel, dinna greet. I wonder Peggie Rodger hadna the sense to cheer ye, when she saw sic trouble on a bit bairn like you; but now ye're putting in your hand to a woman's weird, Katie Stewart; and, for a' folk say, a woman body has nae time, when trouble comes upon her, to ware in greeting, if it binna when the day's dune, and the dark bars wark, and makes mourning lawful. You maun keep up your heart for the sake of them that that wae loof o' yours would take comfort frae; and nae fear o' him—he'll be back afore you're auld enough to make a dounce wife to him, Katie Stewart."

Poor little Katie! it was all she could do to keep that wan smile of hers from ending with another burst of tears; but she swallowed the rising sob with a desperate effort, and was calm.

Lady Anne was full of sympathy—grieved, and concerned for the sorrow of her favorite, though perhaps not so much interested in Willie as was her maid. This deficiency had a very weakening effect on her consolatory speeches; so that while Bauby succeeded in chasing away the tears altogether, they came back in floods under the treatment of Lady Anne.

"Katie, nobody in the world cares more for you than I do. You must not give way so—you must bear up and be calm. Many a one has had a greater trial, Katie,

and there are plenty left to like you dearly. Katie, do you hear me?"

Yes, Katie hears you, Lady Anne; but she is covering her face with her hand—those little slender fingers which last night were pressed on the eyes of Willie Morison, and felt his burning tears—and in her heart, with passion and pride which she can not subdue, refuses to take comfort from this cold consolation, and, rocking back and forward in her chair, weeps without restraint, while you bid her be calm; for you must say it no more, gentle Lady Anne. Dear are you to Katie Stewart as Katie Stewart is to you; but there are in the world who care for her more than you could do, were your heart void of all tenderness but for her; and it is poor comfort to tell her that she has no love that is greater than yours.

"My bairn! my darlin'! ye'll watch his ship into the Firth on a bonnier night than yestreen," whispered Bauby in her ear; "and a waeft' man would he be this day to see the bit bonnie face weel wi' greeting, that should keep a clear e'e for his sake: for he would misdoubt your patience to tarry for him, Katie Stewart, if he kent how you tholed your grief."

"He woudna doubt me: he kens me better," said Katie, dashing aside her tears, and looking up with a flash of defiance in her eye; "for if naeboddy believes me, Willie believes me, and he kens I would wait on him if it were twenty years."

And indignantly Katie wiped her cheek, and raised herself upright upon her chair, while the good Lady Anne looked doubtfully on, half-inclined to resent Bauby's interference, and considerably more than half-inclined to be shocked and horrified, and to think there was something very wrong and indelicate in the grief and tenderness which she did not understand.

"Lady Anne, Lord Colville's captain of a ship," said Katie. "I came to ask you if he couldna get Willie free; because I'll gang to Lady Betty mysel, and so will my mother, if my lord will help Willie."

"Katie, you forget *me*," said Lady Anne, sadly. "If Lord Colville could do any thing, it's me that should take you to Edinburgh. But Lord Colville's away to the sea again, and Betty has no power. I'll write to her to-day, to see if she has any friends that could help. I don't think it, Katie; but we can try."

"But writing's no like speaking, Lady Anne."

"Katie, my sister Betty forgets you no more than she forgets me; and though she's vexed, as well as me, that you have chosen so much below you, yet still, if your happiness is concerned—if it really is concerned, Katie—there is no doubt she will try; and if Betty can do any thing, you need not fear."

"I came up for that," said Katie, under her breath.

"I thought you were coming to stay. I thought you were coming home," said Lady Anne, in a reproachful tone; "but you forget me and every body, Katie, for him."

"No I didna, Lady Anne," said Katie, gasping to keep down the sobs, "but you're in nae trouble—in nae need; and I saw him—I saw him ta'en away from every thing he cares for in the world. Oh, Lady Anne!"

For it was very hard the beginning of this woman's weid.

"For my own part, Bauby," said Lady Anne that night, as her giant maid assisted her to undress, "*I* think it is a providence: for to marry a sailor, even though he is a captain, is a poor fate for Katie Stewart; and if Lord Colville's interest could do him any good, it would be better to get him advanced in the service, as far as a common person can, than to bring him home; for Katie's young, and she'll forget him, Bauby."

"If she does, my lady, I'll never believe what the heart says mair," said Bauby, with an incredulous shake of her head.

"But you don't think how young she is," said Lady Anne, slightly impatient; "and it's not as if she were alone, and nobody to care for her but him. There's her mother, her own family; and there's my sisters and me. If he stays away she'll be content to live all her life at Kellie. She'll forget him, Bauby."

But Bauby only shook her head.

Lady Anne engrossed a greater than usual portion of Bauby's time that night, very much to the discontent of the maid; and when at last, dismissed from her mistress's room, Bauby softly opened Katie's door, and stole in, she found the light extinguished, and every thing dark and silent; for even the moon was veiled in the skies, and the windows of Katie's little bed-chamber did not look toward the distant Firth.

Was she sleeping, worn out with her

first sorrow? Bauby softly drew her head over the pillow, to feel in the darkness for Katie's face—the great rough hand with love and kindness made so gentle; and as it touches the wet cheek, over which her tears are stealing from under the closed eyelids. Bend down Bauby—whisper to her ear—

"They hae a freit in some pair, Ma Katie, that if ane yearns sair to see an away face, ane's maist sure to see it in a dream, and the way it is at the moment if it were thousands of miles away. We ye let him see ye with the tears wet your white cheeks, Katie Stewart, and needing sair, puir man, to hae ye an Fa' asleep wi' a smile on your face, an ain bairn, and he'll see it in his dream."

Now take away your kind hand, Bauby Rodger, and go to your own waking to think of her, and pray for help to your young clouded life—for you are the best comforter.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FEW weeks of suspense and anxiety followed. Lady Betty was written to, and Lady Betty professed her entire inability to do any thing; but Katie was given of Lady Anne's letter, which she had seen, and laboriously indited one herself, the astonishment and admiration of every body about the Milton, and the praise of Bauby Rodger. Katie's letter was not long, but it took a whole day's moment in her little chamber in the Milton to produce it; for Katie had not much experience in the use of her pen.

And, a week after, there was brought to the Milton a note, not quite so good as a modern lady's epistle, and sealed with a great seal, bearing the arms of Colville-Kellie. With trembling fingers Katie opened the inclosure, reverently spying the family emblem.

"MY DEAR LITTLE KATIE—Your letter gave me a clearer idea of what has been in your mind than Anne's did; though you do not think, as I fancy you do, that I was not honest in desiring to serve you. I believe she thinks, and so do I, that I might have done better; but still, I think that, would be glad now to do any thing which would make you the happier. I hope you used to be. For you have

tered the troubled life of a woman far too soon, my dear, and I that am older than you, and that have known you and liked you since you were a very young thing, would be very glad if I could banish all this from your mind, and make you a free, light-hearted girl again, as you should be at your years.

"But as this is not possible, Katie, I would gladly have helped the young man, and perhaps might, if Lord Colville had been at home—though my lord's heart is in the service, and it would have taken much pleading to make him part with a likely seaman, even if it had been in his power. But now, you see, my lord is away, and I can do nothing; not for want of will, my dear Katie, but entirely from want of power.

"However, you must keep up your heart. To serve his king and his country is an honorable employment for a young man. I am sure I think it so for *my* husband; and Providence will guard him in the battle as well as in the storm. If Lord Colville should happen to be in any port where the young man's ship is, we may get him transferred to my lord's own vessel, where, if his conduct was good, he would be sure to rise, for your sake; and I am very sorry this is all I can say to comfort you.

"But, my dear, you must not despond; you must just keep up your heart, and be patient, for you know we have all our share of troubles, more or less; and this can not be helped. You are very young yet, and have plenty of time to wait. Go back to Kellie like a good girl, for Anne is very dull without you; and you must keep up your spirits, and hope the best for the young man.

"Your sincere friend,

"ELIZABETH COLVILLE."

"To serve his king and his country!" repeated little Katie, her eyes flashing through her tears—"as if the king's men hating him like a thief was like to give him heart in the king's cause!—and would the Chevalier, think ye, have done that, either?"

For already the woeful ending of poor Prince Charlie's wild invasion had softened to him all young hearts—had softened even the hearts of those who would have borne arms against his house to the death.

"The Chevalier?—whisht, Katie, ye aunna speak treason," said Mrs. Stew-

art, with her softened tone. "He's maybe no a' that folk could desire, this king, but he's a decent man, sae far as I can hear; and ony way, he's better than a Papish. Ony thing's better than a Papish. And you think the Chevalier wouldna have sanctioned a press-gang? It's a' you ken; he would have sanctioned muckle waur, be you sure. Popery wi' its colored vestments, no to speak of profane music in the kirk on Sabbath days, and prayers read out of a book, and the thumbikins and the rack in the Castle of Edinburgh, and martyrs in the Grassmarket. Eh, lassie, ye dinna ken ye're born!"

Katie put up her hand sadly to her brow, and shook her head.

"What ails ye, my bairn?"

"It's just my head's sair, mother," said Katie.

"Puir bairn—puir thing," said the mother, putting her hand caressingly on the soft pale cheek, and drawing in the pretty head to her breast. "Wha ever heard *you* mint at a sair head before! But Katie, my lamb, ye maun e'en do as the lady says—ye maun keep up your heart, for mine's near the breaking to look at ye, sae white as ye are; and sae would Willie's be, if he kent. When ye gang owre the green in the morning, Katie, mony's the gowan ye set your bit foot upon; but the minute the footstep's past, up comes the gowan's head as blithe as ever, and naebod's the waur. My poor bairn, ye're young—ye dinna ken yet, Katie, how young ye are; and ye maun spring up like the gowans, my lamb."

Katie said nothing in reply; but when at last she withdrew her head from her mother's breast, it was to steal into her old corner, and draw to her the little wheel and spin. The wheel hummed a pensive, plaintive song, and Mrs. Stewart went softly about the room with stealthy steps, as if some one lay sick in the house; and Merran in the background handled the plates she was washing with elaborate care, and, when one rang upon another, pressed her teeth upon her nether lip, and glanced reverentially at Katie, as if there was something profane in the sound. But Katie heard it not—she was wandering with vague steps about the country of dreams—now hither, now thither, like a traveler in a mist; and at last, as the hushed silence continued, and through it her wheel hummed on, some sudden association struck her, and she began to sing.

Not a sad song—for such is not the caprice of grief—a gay summer song like a bird's. She sang it to the end, only half conscious of what she was doing; while Mrs. Stewart turned away to the open door to wipe her eyes unseen; and Merran looked on with awe from the background, believing her senses had failed her. But her senses had not failed her.

"Mother," said little Katie, as she snapt the thread on the wheel, and finished her hank of yarn—"mother, I'll spin nae mair the day—it's no time yet—I would like to do something else; but I'm gaun to keep up my heart."

And Katie put up her hand to dry the last tear.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THESE long days wear away, one can not tell how—so long, so pitilessly long!—from the sweet fresh hour when the sun begins to steal in through the pointed window, and Katie, lying awake, hears Merran begin to stir below, and catches the whispering sound of fragments of song and old tunes, which she sings under her breath; until the sunset, when the dewy shadows fall lengthened and drawn out upon the grass, and the skies have upon them that perfect rest which belongs only to the evening. But the days do go by noiselessly, a silent procession, and Katie is keeping up her heart.

For she has a letter—two letters—saying these same often-repeated words to her; and Willie's encouragement is the more likely to have effect for the words that follow it. "Dinna let your heart down, Katie," writes the pressed sailor, "for if I can but aye believe ye mind me, I fear no trouble in this world. I'm stout, and young, and able for work, and I have it in me to be patient when I mind what ye said that weary night we parted. Only tell me you're no grieving about me;—that's no what I mean either: but say again what ye said yon night, and I'll be as near content as I can be till I'm home again."

So she is keeping up her heart, poor Katie! with no very great success at first; but these days wear away, the longest of them, and now she gratefully hails the darkness when it comes a half-hour earlier, and thinks it a relief. Time and the hour; but sometimes she sits listlessly in

the kitchen of the Milton and looks at the clock—the slow, punctual, unhesitating, with every second gliding from it, rounded and perfect like a mimic globe. Time is short, say the people; but you do not think so if you watch those slow methodical seconds, and note how that little steel finger, which you can scarcely see has to accomplish its gradual round before one minute is gone. Katie has no wait to observe this procession, but she looks at the unwearied clock, and her heart beats for if all the hearts in the world beat with yearning to hasten it, still, beat by beat, would move that steady pale time.

It was August now, and the harvest had begun. John Stewart, without any pretense of being a farmer, had "a piece o' aits" in one corner, and "a pickle wha' in another; and Merran's services were required out of doors, so that the mother and daughter were left much alone.

Near the door, within sight of the sunshine, and within reach of those merry sounds which tell of a band of merry-makers in the neighborhood, Katie is sitting at the wheel. She has put off the dress she usually wears, and this is a plainer and more fit, her mother thinks, for every-day use at home—made of linen woven in two different shades of blue, a dark and a light in equal stripes. The black lace apron is laid aside, too, and there is a little narrow frills round this one, which is the same as the gown; and a plain white linen cuff terminates the sleeve, instead of the cambric ruffles. But the wheel goes round busily, and Katie is singing—keeping up her heart.

In the corner, between the fire and the window the usual place for the wheel—lounges Janet, fulfilling with devoted purpose in paying this visit, which was to have a crack" with her mother. Alan has sailed some time ago; and his young wife, with no children yet, nor any domestic cares to trouble her, further the putting into some degree of order her small rooms, has acquired a great habit of lounging and having "cracks." The key of her house is in her pocket, and Janet has not the least affection for the unemployed wheel at home.

"It's awfu' dreary living in the town folks' lane," said Janet, lounging and yawning.

"What do ye gie thae great gams in ye idle cuttie?" asked Mrs. Stewart.

"Weel, but what am I to do? and I'm whiles no weel, mother," said Janet, with importance. "I wish Alick had bidden still, and no gane to the sea."

"And what would have come o' you and your house then?" said her mother. "Woman, I would rather spin for siller than sit wi' my hands before me, gaunting like that!"

"Eh, losh! wha's yon?" exclaimed Janet.

There was no great difficulty in ascertaining, for immediately Lady Anne Erskine stood on the threshold of the Milton.

"Oh, Katie, why do you stay so long away?" said Lady Anne, taking both her favorite's hands into her own. "Mrs. Stewart, I've come to ask you for Katie. Will you let her come home with me?"

"I'm sure you're very kind, my lady," said the evasive mother.

"I am not kind—but I am alone, Mrs. Stewart, and I care for nobody half so much as for Katie; we have been together all our lives. Let her come with me to Kellie. Katie, will you come?"

"And I'll put my key in my pouch, and come hame and help ye, mother," said Janet in an aside.

Katie looked doubtfully from Lady Anne to her mother—from her mother back to Lady Anne; and putting her wheel softly away with one hand, waited for a decision.

"If it would do ye good, Katie—would you like to gang to Kellie, my woman?"

"And it's aye taupie and cuttie to me—no'er a better word," said Janet, under her breath.

"If she wearies we'll send her back," said Lady Anne eagerly. "The carriage is waiting off the road, and there's Bauby sick with wishing for you, Katie. Mrs. Stewart, you'll let her come?"

The carriage indeed stood on the high-road, grandly glittering under the sun, and with already some admiring children from West Anster school standing round the impatient horses. Mrs. Stewart could not resist the splendor.

"Weel, bairn, weel! away and get on your things—diuna keep Lady Anne waiting."

And Katie, looking out to nod, and smile to Bauby Rodger, who stood on the bridge over the burn waiting to see her, ran up-stairs with something like a glow of pleasure on her face, to put on once again her cambric ruffles and her silken mantle.

"Will ye no come in and take a bite of something, Bauby?" said Janet, stealing out to speak to the maid, while her mother engaged the lady within.

"Was't her that was singing? the dear bairn!" said Bauby, with glistening eyes. "It put me in heart to hear her; for, puir thing, she's had a hard beginning."

"Mony a man's been pressed as guid as Willie Morison," said Janet, tossing her head; "but ye spoil Katie amang ye. Are ye no gaun to see your ain sister, Bauby, and her man away?"

"Ay, I'm gaun," said Bauby, shortly, not thinking it necessary to mention what Peggie did next day to all the town, that her whole hoarded year's wages came with her to help the "sair warstle" with which the wife of the pressed sailor was maintaining her children; "but Peggie's come to years, and has her bairns. Aweel, I wat they're an unco handfu', puir things, but it's a grand divert to grief to have them to fecht for. Noo, the bit lassie!"

Janet put her hand in her pocket to feel that she had not lost her key, and shrugged her shoulders; for though very sympathetic at first, her patience had worn out long ago.

And, to Bauby's infinite satisfaction, "the bit lassie" appeared immediately, leaning on Lady Anne's arm, and with a healthful, pleasant glow upon her face.

"For, Bauby," whispered Katie, as she shook hands with her, and passed on through the field to the waiting carriage, "I'm keeping up my heart."

"And blessings on you, my bairn," said Bauby, wiping her eyes; for she had seen the tears in Katie's which did not fall.

The two friends—for, in spite of all differences of rank and manners, such they were—drove on for some time in silence, along that sea-side highway, running level with the sunny Firth. On such a day last year, and in the same harvest season, they had traveled together to Edinburgh; but both, since then, had learned and suffered much.

Quiet, silent Anne Erskine! No one knew how your heart beat—with what strange chivalrous enthusiasm your whole frame thrilled—when the Prince passed through the grand old Edinburgh street, and, with the grace of his race, bowed under your window to the crowds that cheered him; for utterance was not given to the Ode which burned in your heart, and no one knew that hour had been, and

was gone—the climax of your youth. No one dreamed that upon you, who were not born a poet, the singing mantle and the garland had come down in an agony, and only the harp been withheld. But it was withheld—though you still can not forget the stormy cadence of the music, which rushed through your brain like the wind, carrying with it a wild grand mist of disordered words. They never became audible in song or speech to other ears than yours—could not, had you labored for it night and day; but still you remember them in your heart.

And since then the hero of this dream has been a fugitive, with only the wildest of mountain fastnesses, the truest of poor friends, to guard him; and eyes of Whigs, which would have fiercely flashed upon his soldiers in the battle, have wept tears for Prince Charlie in the flight. But no one knows what tears you have wept, gentle Lady Anne! nor how the grand tumult of yonder climax hour still echoes and sighs about your heart in a wail of lamentation;—sighs gradually dying away—echoes long drawn out, merging into the calm of the natural life; but you can never forget the inspiration which no one knows but you.

And little Katie there, silently leaning back in her corner. Katie has had her heart awakened into consciousness in another and more usual way; and Katie has the larger experience of the two—not of Love and Grief alone, these common twin-children of humanity, but of the graver discipline which puts into our hands the helm and rein of our own hearts. A willful girl but a little while ago—now a woman with a conscious will, subduing under it the emotions which are as strong as her life;—learning to smile over her tears for the sake of others—learning not only to counterfeit calmness, but to *have* it for the sake of those who break their hearts to see her suffer; practiced to restrain the power of sorrow—to keep up, with many a struggle, the sinking heart. All these results, and the efforts which have led to them are unknown to Lady Anne, who has no rebellious feelings to restrain; so that Katie has made the furthest progress in the training of actual life.

"You're better now, Katie," said Lady Anne, tenderly.

"Yes, Lady Anne," was the answer; and Katie for an instant drooped her head.

"Yes, I'm better, Lady Anne," she re-

peated, looking up with a smile; "and I'll be glad, very glad, to see Kellie again."

"My poor little Katie!" said good Anne Erskine, taking the little soft hand into her own—and a tear fell on hers—a tear of confidence, telling what Katie would not tell in words.

"But, Lady Anne, dinna be vexed in me—for I'm keeping up my heart."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I'll never forget you, Willie, if should be twenty years!"

Is it fear of yourself—forebodings of an inconstant heart which bring these words again, Katie Stewart, to your lips and your mind? Time and the hour have run their deliberate course through long twelve months;—a blank even plain, which looks brief, as you turn back upon it, for all so weary it was, as step by step you paced its dreary way. Is some one walks beside you, through the long avenue toward Kellie. Is it you fear yourself, Katie Stewart!—that already your word is broken—your heart a conscious traitor?

It is an autumn night, with such a sky loaded with such black clouds as which overspread the world nearly a year ago when Katie was betrothed—the wind in fitful gusts whirls and eddies about the great trees overhead, snatching again from the boughs the yellow leaves, drops them, like love-tokens at her feet. A melancholy wind—brightens the eye and flushes the cheek against which it spends its strength; though autumn wails and fills before with the chill breath of winter pursue her track, yet the windows glow in cas and cottage, and hearths grow bright with a radiance kinder than the very sun; that the song within rises on the wind without, and drowns it; and, as it is, we wot not of, which makes us feeble in presence of the dead, so the garments which the earth and we possess are but so many blithe assurances that summer comes again.

And Katie Stewart is no longer a girl but her three-and-twenty years have schooled her little, though the mother is Milton at home reflects, not without shame that at three-and-twenty "a bairn of mirth" still bears her father's name. The

pretty figure moves about with as little constraint, as little heaviness, as when only seventeen years had fallen upon it in sunshine; and peace is shining in the blue eyes, and health on the soft cheek. More than that; for still the favorite in Kellie Castle will have her own way—and has it—and still the eerie gallery rings with her blithe step and blither voice; and as well pleased as ever does Katie contemplate the delicate ruffles at her sleeve, and the warm mantle of scarlet cloth, with its rich tassels and silken lining, which has replaced for winter comfort the pretty cloak of silk and lace. For these five years have made it no longer hard to keep up her heart; and has she forgotten?

Some one walks by her side through the avenue, stooping down just now to make out if he can what that murmur was, which he could faintly hear as she turned her head aside. And this is no merchant-sailor—no yeoman laird; for even in the dimness of the twilight, you can see the diamond glitter on his finger through the rich lace which droops over his hand. His right arm is in a sling, and his face pale—for not long ago he was wounded;—a fortunate wound for him, since it removed the attainer under which he lay, and suffered him to return to his own land.

For the rebel of the '45, languishing in a far country, could not see his own race in battle with a foreign enemy without instinctively rushing to join his native ranks. Very true, they fought for King George—in name at least, of King George; but, truer, they were Scotchmen, Englishmen, his own blood and kin, and he could not fold his hands and look on. Desperately wounded he had been in the first battle, and in pity and admiration they sent Sir Alexander home.

Sir Alexander! The young knight who sent you the white roses, Katie Stewart—who woke many a starting thought and fancy in the girlish free heart which questioned with itself if this was the hero. Now, tried by some troubles—the fiery young spirit mellowed and deepened—the spells of patriotism and loyalty—desperate courage and present suffering to charm to him the enthusiast mind;—how is it now?

But you scarcely can tell by this that Katie says, under her breath, as she looks up toward the sky, "If it were twenty years!"

The firelight shines brightly through the uncurtained window of the west room, but no Lady Anne is there when Katie enters;

for already there are lights in the great drawing-room, and servants go about busily, preparing for the party which is to meet within its haunted bounds to-night. Lady Anne is still in her own room, but her toilet is already completed; so that Bauby Rodger, who stands here before the fire, has come in quest of Katie, to ascertain that she is "fit to be seen;" for again Katie must take her embroidery frame, and her seat in a corner of the great drawing room, for her own pleasure and Lady Anne's.

Glowing from the cold wind is Katie's face, and her eyes sparkle in the light like stars. But this brilliant look brings a cold misgiving to Bauby Rodger's heart; and as she looses the scarlet hood which comes closely round the face of the little beauty, and puts back the curl which in this light actually gleams and casts a reflection like gold, she thinks of the young sailor fighting upon the sea, and sighs.

"What way do you sigh, Bauby?"

"What way do I sigh?" Bauby shook from the pretty cloak one or two raindrops which it had caught of the shower which now began to patter against the windows. "Weel, ane canna aye tell; but it's no sae lang since ye sighed whiles yoursel, when there lookit to be little enough reason."

"But ane can aye tell what it's about when ane's angry Bauby," said Katie Stewart.

"And what should I be angry for? It's no my place, Miss Katie. Ilka ane kens best for themsel when it's the time to sigh and when it's the time to smile, and young folk havena auld memories: it's no to be expected of them. I'm no that auld either mysel—though I might be the mother of twa or three like you; but there's folk dwells in my remembrance, Katie Stewart—dwells—like them that bide at hame. I'm blithe o' ye getting up your heart—ne'er heed me;—but whiles—I canna help it—I think upon them that's awa."

And Katie Stewart spoke not, answered not, but drawing the lace on her apron slowly through her fingers, looked down into the glowing fire and smiled.

What did it mean? Bauby looked at her wistfully to decipher it, but could not meet her eye. Was it the smile of gratified vanity—was it the modest self-confidence of truth? But though Bauby began straightway to arrange this shining golden hair, on which still other rain-drops glim

mer like diamonds, the smile eludes her comprehension still.

"I'll go and get my gown," said Katie, as she contemplated her hair in the glass, and proclaimed herself satisfied; "and ye'll help me, Bauby, to put it on."

"Ay, gang like a guid bairn; and ye'll get some rose-water for your hands on the little table in the window; but there's nae fire in your ain room, and it's wearing cauld—dinna bide lang there. Weel, weel," said Bauby Rodger, leaning her arms on the mantle-piece, and looking down with perplexed eyes to the fire, as Katie went away—"nae doubt, if she did better for hersel it would be my pairt to rejoice; but when I mind that bonnie lad, and sae fond as he was about her—as wha could help being fond o' her?—I scarce can thole that she should take up wi' anither; but it's the way of the world."

And again Bauby sighed—so great a sigh that the flame of the lamp flickered before her breath, as before some fugitive gale.

In a few minutes the subject of her thoughts returned, carrying over her arm her grand gala dress. It was quite a superb dress for Katie Stewart—almost as fine, indeed, as the one Lady Anne is to wear to-night, and quite as splendid as that famous gown in which Leddy Kilbrachmont was married, though the fame of it traveled through half-a-dozen parishes. This white silk petticoat is Leddy Kilbrachmont's gift; and Mrs. Stewart herself presented to her daughter that rich ruby-colored silken gown. It was to have been Katie's wedding-gown had all things gone well, and has lain for several years unmade, in waiting, if perhaps it had been needed for that occasion. But Katie is three-and-twenty, and her marriage-day seems as far off as ever, while still her bridegroom bears, far away, the dangers of the sea and of the war; so the gown is made, that in the Lady Erskine's parties Katie may be presentable, and Lady Erskine herself has added the ruffles of lace to those graceful sleeves.

The gown is on, the lace carefully draped over the round white arms; and Bauby stands before her, smoothing down the rich folds of the silk, and shedding back those little rings of short hair which will escape and curl upon Katie's temples.

"Now ye're gaun in, ye're gaun in," said Bauby, looking with troubled eyes into her favorite's face, "and ne'er a gane kens what

mischief may be done before ye come out o' that room this night."

But Katie only laughed, and lifted the little embroidery frame which was to go with her into the great drawing-room.

Again a room full of those graceful noble people—itsself a noble room, with many portraits on its walls, some of them fine all of them bearing a kindly historical interest to the guests who counted in through this lady and that, with the loss of Kellie; and again a brilliant stream of conversation, which dazzles Katie as then it once did, though with much delicacy she still takes little part, but remains an amused observer, a quiet listener looking up from her work with bright intelligent glances which make the speaker grateful; and there, like her shadow, is a scarf binding his disabled arm, and his face as interesting as a handsome face can be—there, again, stands Sir Alexander.

Look up into his face, Katie Stewart—look up, as you could not do on your beautiful autumnal night, when Lady Colville's crimson curtains threw a ruddy shade upon your face, and made him think you blushed. It may be that you blushed—blushes of the imagination harmless and without peril; but now the color on your cheek is steady as the tints of a rose, and you look up with open eyes into his face. He speaks it but though your voice is never loud to give him answers which others hear frankly, without even the hesitation of the downcast glances with which you answer the old, lofty, stately gentleman who speaks to you now and then with kindly smiles; for that is the head of the house of Lindsay, the father of that Lady Anne, whom all Scotland shall love and after for one of the sweetest ballads which makes our language musical. And you look down shyly, Katie Stewart, when you speak to the Earl of Balcarras, because it is beyond question a grand gentleman the grandest antique type; but you need not hesitate nor look down when you answer Sir Alexander, because he is living Kellie, and you see him every day. You have almost forgotten that at one time he would have made him a hero. He is a hero to all intents and purposes now—a fit subject for romance or ballad—brave, loyal, unfortunate—an attained knight once, a free man now, for his valor's sake but willful Katie Stewart remembers

nothing of the white roses—nothing of the moonlight night on the oriel window—but, leaning her little impatient hands upon her embroidery frame, looks up into his face, and smiles and talks to him as if he were her brother.

The good, brave, simple, knightly heart! this voice has haunted him in painful flight and bivouac—has spoken audible words to him in the fair moonlight of southern lands—has been his ideal of comfort and gladness many a day when he needed both; and this not only because himself was charmed with the young fresh spirit, but because those flushed cheeks and downcast eyes persuaded him that he *was* the hero, the magician to whose mystic touch the chords of this harp could thrill as they had never thrilled before. And it was not all the crimson curtain, Katie Stewart—not all; and there was a magician at work, breathing prelude whispers over these wondrous strings;—only the weird hand was a hand within yourself, unseen, impalpable, and not the hand of Alexander Erskine.

He begins to find this out to-night—and well it is only now; for before, he was alone, exiled, distressed, and carried about with him this fanciful remembrance and affection, like some fairy companion to cheer and gladden him. Now, it is very true, his face grows blank, his head droops, and uneasily his restless hand moves on the back of the high chair he leans on; but many bright faces are round him—many hearts are eager to question, to sympathize, to admire. The wound will shoot and pain him, perhaps through all these winter days, and into the spring; but the wound is not mortal, and it will heal.

And Katie Stewart lifts her window that night and looks out to the west, which the pallid moon is nearing, and smiles—smiles, but tears are there withal to obscure her shining eyes; for, as she observes this nightly loving superstition, there comes sometimes a vague terror upon her that he may be lying dreamless and silent upon some death-encumbered deck, for whom she sends this smile away to the far west to shine into his dreams; and, as she closes her window, and sits down by the little table on which she has placed her light, the sickness of long deferred hope comes flooding over her heart, and she hides her face in her hands. Day after day, year upon year, how they have glided past—

so slow that every footfall came to have its separate sound, and it seems as though she had counted every one; and Katie bows her head upon the little Bible on her table, and speaks in her heart to One whom these years and hours have taught her to know, but whom she knew not before.

And then she lays her head on her pillow and falls asleep—falls asleep as Bauby Rodger bade her, long ago, smiling for his dream's sake.

CHAPTER XXV.

"KATIE, Katie, your roses take long to bloom," said Lady Anne Erskine; "here is where you began last year, and they are not out of the bud yet."

"But Miss Katie has had other gear in hand, Lady Anne—your ladyship disna mind," said Bauby, in a slight tone of reproof.

"If Bauby had only kept count how many yards of cambric, I've hemmed for Lordie," said Katie Stewart; "and look, Lady Anne—see."

For to the ends of a delicate cambric cravat Katie is sewing a deep border of lace—old rich lace which the Lady Erskine, not unmindful for herself of such braveries, is expending on her son.

"Well, you know, Katie, I think Lordie is too young," said Lady Anne, drawing herself up slightly; "and so did Janet when I told her; but no doubt Lady Erskine is his mother; he's scarcely thirteen yet—and lace like that!"

"He's a bonnie boy, my lady; and then he's Earl of Kellie now," said the maid—for Lady Anne in these years had lost her father.

"So he is. It makes a difference, no doubt; but Janet says if he was her son—Katie, what ails ye!"

"It's naething, Lady Anne; it's just a letter," answered Katie, who, sitting within reach of the open door, had seen the housekeeper appear in the gallery, beckoning and holding up the precious epistle; "I'll be back the now."

And Lordie's lace fell on the floor at the feet of Lady Anne.

The good Lady Anne took it up gravely, and shook her head.

"She'll never be any wiser, Bauby; we need not expect it now, you know and

she gets letters from only one person. But I think Katie is getting over that. She's forgetting the sailor, Bauby."

"I dinna ken, my lady," said Bauby mournfully, as, kneeling on the carpet with a round work-basket before her, she pursued her occupation, unraveling a mass of bright silks, which lay matted in seemingly hopeless entanglement within the grasp of her great hands.

"But I think so, Bauby; and I think Sir Alexander likes her. If he sought her—though it would be a poor, poor match for an Erakine—she surely would never think of the sailor more."

Bauby lifted her head indignantly; but Lady Anne's mild eyes were cast down upon her work, and the flaming glance did no execution.

"Ane disna ken, my lady; it's ill to judge," was the ambiguous, oracular reply.

"But one does know what one thinks. Do you not *think* her mind is as free as it used to be?—do you not think she has forgotten him, Bauby?"

Bauby was perplexed and unwilling to answer—unwilling to confess how she feared and doubted for poor Willie Morrison, now sailing in Lord Colville's ship, and as well as a pressed sailor could be; so she bent her head, and exclaimed against an obstinate, impracticable knot, to gain time.

It served her purpose; for before the knot yielded, Katie came stealing into the room with shining wet eyes, and some shy triumph and unusual pride upon her face. The face itself was flushed; it could not fail to be so, for Katie felt the quiet scrutiny of Lady Anne, and the eager, impatient glances of Bauby, searching her thoughts in her look; and bright shy looks she gave them—first to the maid, the most interested, who felt her faith strengthened by the glance; and then to the gentle, solicitous lady, who looked tenderly at the moisture on her cheek, but laid Lordie's lace cravat on the table notwithstanding, and said, with a slight, unconscious censure.

"You threw it down, Kate, when you went away."

"I didna ken, Lady Anne," said Katie, in so low an under tone, that her friend had to stoop toward her to hear, "for I wanted to get my letter."

The eyes of Bauby brightened, and Lady Anne moved with a little impatience on her chair.

"Well; but there will be no new Katie? I suppose he tells you no new?"

"Yes, Lady Anne."

"Then, Katie, why do you not tell me? Has any thing happened to my brother? Is the young man still in Lord Colville's ship?"

"There's naething ails my lord, Lady Anne—only he's been kind to Willie Morrison now—now he's just among the common men nae mair, nor the small officers either—but he's a master in a ship."

"Master in a ship?" Bauby sprang to her feet, overturning her work-basket, and the placid Lady Anne was sufficiently moved to lose her seat.

"Master in a ship!" "He says it disna mean Captain," said Katie, the bright tears running over of her full eyes; "but it's Master in sailing—and a man that's master in sailing canna be far from master in ship. And it's a sloop of war; but it's of war's no like the little trading ship the Firth, Lady Anne. It's master-rigged like a ship, Willie says, and better than that weary cutter; and now he's among the officers, where he should be, and no a common man."

And Katie put down her face in her hands, and cried for very joy.

"She needs nae comfort the poor lady," said Bauby in a whisper, as Lady Anne drew her hand caressingly over Katie's hair: "let her greet; it's blithe to greet when ane's heart is glad, and running owre wi' joy."

"Then you can look for my letter," said Lady Anne.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Lady Erakine began to feel considerably encumbered with her sister's presence. At present, with many schemes, she was laboring in her vocation, receiving and sending invitations in an energetic manner to get poor Anne "off." But Lady Anne herself had not the least idea of getting off: her romance was over—a short, unusual one; and now the west room, with its embroidery frame—the quiet daily—the frequent visit to Lady Jane and her children—and the not unfrequent visits of Lady Betty, sufficed to fill her peaceful contentment the quiet days of Lady Anne. The poor Lady Erakine

She had succeeded in awakening a dormant liking for "her dear sister" in the comfortable breast of a middle-aged, eligible, landed gentleman, whose residence lay conveniently near the Castle. A long time it took to make this good man know his own mind, and many were the delicate hints and insinuations by which the match-maker did her utmost to throw light upon the subject. At length a perception began to dawn upon him: he thought he had found out, the honest man, that this mind of his, hitherto, in his own consciousness, solely occupied with crops and hunts, good wine and local politics, had been longing all its life for the "refined companionship" of which Lady Erskine preached to him; and as he found it out, he sighed. Still, if it must be, it must, and the idea of Lady Anne was not unendurable; so the good man put on a new wig, like the Laird of Cockpen, and, mounting his mare, rode cannily to Kellie Castle.

But Lady Anne, like Mrs. Jean, said No—said it as quietly, with a little surprise, but very little discomposure, and no signs of relenting. "As if men came to the Castle every day on such like errands!" said the wooer to himself, with some heat, and considerable bewilderment, as the turrets of Kellie disappeared behind him, when he went away.

Still more indignant and injured felt the Lady of Kellie; but the culprit said not a word in self-defense; so more parties were given, more invitations accepted, and Lady Erskine even vaguely intimated the expediency of visiting London for a month or two. Anne was full five-and-twenty; and her sister-in-law never looked upon the unmarried young lady but with self-reproach, and fear lest people might say that she had neglected her duty.

But the parties would not do. Quiet unselfish, sincere, the young ladies and the young gentlemen made Anne Erskine their friend—confided troubles to her—told her of love distresses; young men, even, who might have spoken to her—Lady Erskine thought—of that subject as principal, and not as *confidante*; but Lady Anne felt no disappointment. It is true she remembered, with a certain quiet satisfaction, that it was her own fault she was still Anne Erskine, and thought kindly of the good man who had generously put it in her power to refuse him; but in this matter Lady Anne's

ambition went no further, and Lady Erskine was foiled.

So, under the high window in the west room, Lady Anne sits happily at her embroidery frame, and works the quiet hours away. She is laboring at a whole suit of covers for those high-backed, upright chairs in Lady Colville's drawing-room—and many a pretty thing besides has Lady Colville from the same unfailling loom; and rich are those little girls of Lady Janet's, who sometimes tumble about this pleasant apartment and ravel the silks with which patient aunt Anne makes flowers bloom for them upon that perennial canvas. And Katie Stewart draws a low chair to Lady Anne's feet, and plays with her embroidery frame sometimes; sometimes, among fine linen and cambric, works at garments for Lordie; and sometimes, bending those undisciplined shoulders over a great volume on her knee, reads aloud to the placid, unwearying worker above her, whose shoulders own no stoop as her fingers no weariness. Or Katie sings at her work those songs about Strephon and Chloe which poor Sir Alexander thought so sweet; and Lady Erskine, pausing as she passes, comes in to hear, and to spend a stray half-hour in local gossip, which none of all the three are quite above; and Bauby Rodger expatiates about the room, and makes countless pilgrimages to Lady Anne's own apartment, and now and then crosses the gallery, visible through the half-open door, bearing a load of delicate lace and cambric, which she constantly has in reserve to be "ironed" when she's "no thrang;"—and so they spend their life.

An uneventful, quiet life, sweetened with many unrecorded charities—a life disturbed by no storms, distressed by no hardships—full of peace so great that they hardly knew it to be peace, and rich with love and kindness into which there entered neither passion nor coldness, indifference nor distrust. The sunshine came and went; the days, all of one quiet sisterhood, passed by with steps so soft they left no print. And as the days passed, so did the years;—slowly, but you scarce could call them tedious: with sober cheer and smiling faces, each one you looked on growing more mature than that which went before;—and so Time and the hour passed on unwearying, and five other long twelvemonths glided by into the past.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"LORDIE, you're only a laddie. I wonder how you can daur to speak that way to me!"

"But it's true for all that, Katie," said the young Earl of Kellie.

Katie Stewart is leaning against a great ash-tree, which just begins, in this bright April weather, to throw abroad its tardy leaves to the soft wind and the sun. A tear of anger is in Katie's blue eye, a blush of indignation on her cheek; for Lordie—Lordie, whom she remembers "a little tiny boy," who used to sit on her knee—has just been saying to her what the modest Sir Alexander never ventured to say, and has said it in extravagant language and very doubtful taste, as the most obstreperous Strephon might have said it; while Katie, desperately resentful, could almost cry for shame.

Before her stands the young lord, in the graceful dress of the time, with one of the beautiful cambric cravats which Katie made, about his neck, and the rich lace ends falling over "the open-stitch hem" of his shirt—Katie's workmanship too. A tall youth, scarcely yet resolved into a man, Lordie is, to tell the truth, slightly awkward, and swings about his length of limb by no means gracefully. Neither is his face in the least degree like Sir Alexander's face, but sallow and transitionist, like his form; and Lordie's voice is broken and, remaining no longer a boy's voice, croaks with a strange discordance, which does not belong to manhood. The youth is in earnest, however—there can be no question of that.

"I'll be of age in three years, Katie."

"I'm eight-and-twenty, my Lord Kellie," said Katie, drawing herself up; "I'm John Stewart of the Milton's daughter, and troth-plighted to one William Morison master of the Poole. Maybe you didna hear, or may have forgotten; and I'm Lady Anne's guest in Kellie, and have a right that no man should say uncivil words to me as far as its shadow falls."

"But Katie, nobody's uncivil to you. Have you not known me all my life?"

"I've carried ye down this very road, Lordie," said Katie with emphasis.

"Well, well; what of that?" said the young man impatiently. "Katie, why can't you listen to me? I tell you—"

"If you tell me another word mair, I'll never enter Kellie Castle again, as lang

as ye're within twenty mile," cried the angry Katie.

"You'll be in a better humor next time," said the young lord, as, a little subdued, he turned away.

Katie stood by the ash-tree, looking after him; and after he was gone, she remained still, silently looking down the avenue. Ten years—ten weary years had passed since Willie Morison was taken away; for little Katie Stewart was left at the close of her eighteenth year, has now seen eight-and-twenty summers—and to-morrow will complete the twelvemonth since the cutter's bark sailed into Anster harbor, and robbed the town of her stoutest sons.

And Katie looks away to the west, and prays in her heart for the ending of the war—though sometimes, sickened with the weary flood of successive days, she wonders what the village prophets say, that these are the last times, and that the war will never end—or that the war will end without bringing safety to Willie; and she rises into her grave woman's eyes, and puts up her hand to wipe them, for they seldom come in floods, as the tears did, but are bitterer, saltier than even those.

Ten years! But her eyes are dimmed, her cheek unfaded, and you could not guess by Katie Stewart's face that she had seen the light so long; only that heart Katie feels an unnatural weariness, which troubles her—a long strange patience, which seems to have beaten her spirit—and she thinks she is growing old.

Poor, vain, boyish Lordie! He is not so, she is ruminating on his words, as he goes slowly home; but his words have passed from her mind, with the momentary anger they occasioned; and Katie sighs out the weariness which oppresses her heart. It does not oppress her often, but now and then it silently overcomes her; weary, very weary—wondering these days and years will ever come looking back to see them, gone like a dream, looking forward to the interminable succession of them, which crowd upon her, and inarticulate like the last, and that if she could only see an end—there it ends!

Bauby Rodger stands under the west window in the west room, with a letter in his hand. You could almost fancy Bauby a common prying-waiting-woman, if

amines the superscription so curiously ; but Bauby would scorn to glance within, were it in her power.

"Miss Katie, here's ane been wi' a letter to you," said Bauby, not without suspicion, as she delivered it into Katie's hand.

A ship letter—but not addressed by Willie Morison—and Katie's fingers tremble as she breaks the seal. But it is Willie Morison's hand within.

"MY DEAR KATIE—I am able to write very little—only a word to tell you not to be feared if you hear that I'm killed ; for I'm not killed just yet. There's a leg the doctor thinks he will need to have, and some more things ail me—fashious things to cure ; but I never can think that I've been so guarded this whole time, no to be brought home at last ;—for God is aye kind and so (now that I'm lamed and useless) is man. If I must die, blessings on you, Katie, for minding me ; and we'll meet yet in a place that will be *home*, though not the home we thought of. But if I live, I'll get back—back to give you the refusing of a disabled man, and a lamiter. Katie, fare-ye-well ! I think upon ye night and day, whether I live or die.

W. MORISON.

"Katie Stewart ! my bairn ! my lamb !" exclaimed Bauby, hastening to offer the support of her shoulder to the tottering figure, which sadly needed it—for the color had fled from Katie's very lips, and her eyes were blind with sickness—"what ails ye my darlin' ? What's happened, Miss Katie ? Oh, the Lord send he binna killed !"

"He's no killed, Bauby," said Katie hoarsely—"he's no killed—he says he's no killed ; but no ane near him that cares for him, no ane within a thousand miles but what would make as muckle of anither man ; and the hands of thae hard doctors on my puir Willie—my puir Willie ! Oh, Bauby, Bauby ! do ye think he's gane ?"

"No, my lamb ! he's no gane," cried Bauby gravely. "Do ye think the spirit that likit ye sae weel could have passed without a sign ? and I've heard nae death-warning in this house since the Earl departed. Ye may plead for him yet with the Ane that can save ; and oh ! be thankful, my bairn, that ye needna to gang lang pilgrimages to a kirk or a temple, but can lift up your heart wherever ye be !"

And Bauby drew her favorite close to

her breast, and covered the wan, tearful face with her great sheltering hand, while she too lifted up her heart—the kind, God-fearing, tender heart, which dwelt so strangely in this Herculean frame.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It is a June day, but not a bright one, and Katie has left the coroneted gate of Kellie Castle, and takes the road downward to the Firth ; for she is going to the Milton to see her mother.

Why she chooses to strike down at once to the sea, instead of keeping by the more peaceful way along the fields, we can not tell, for the day is as boisterous as if it had been March instead of June ; and as she gradually nears the coast, the wind, growing wilder and wilder, swells into a perfect hurricane ; but it pleases Katie—for, restless with anxiety and fear, her mind can not bear the summer quietness, and it calms her in some degree to see the storm.

For it is two months now since she received the letter which told her of Willie's wounds ; and since she has heard nothing of him—if he lives, or if he has died. It is strange how short the ten years look, to turn back upon them now, shorter than these sunny weeks of May just past, which her fever of anxious thought has lengthened into ages. Poor Willie ! she thinks of him as if they had parted yesterday—alone in the dark cabin or dreary hospital, tended by strange hands—by men's hands—with doctors (and they have a horror of surgery in these rural places, and think all operators barbarous) guiding him at their will ; and Katie hurries along with a burning hectic on her cheek, as for the hundredth time she imagines the horrors of an operation—though it is very true that even her excited imagination falls far short of what was then, in too many cases, the truth.

And now the graceful antique spire of St. Monance shoots up across the troubled sky, and beyond it the Firth is plunging madly, dashing up wreaths of spray into the air, and roaring in upon the rocks with a long angry swell, which in a calmer hour would have made Katie fear. But now it only excites her as she struggles in the face of the wind to the highway which runs along the coast, and having gained it, pauses very near the village of St. Monance, to look out on the stormy sea.

At her right hand—its green inclosure, dotted with gravestones, projecting upon the jagged, bristling rocks, which now and then are visible, stretching far into the Firth, as the water sweeps back with the great force of its recoil—stands the old church of St. Monance. Few people here-about know that this graceful old building—then falling into gradual decay—is at all finer than its neighbors in Pittenweem and Anstruther; but that it is old, “awfu’ auld,” any fisher lad will tell you; and the little community firmly and devoutly believes that it was built by the Picts, and has withstood these fierce sea-breezes for more than a thousand years, though the minister says it was founded by the holy King David, that “sair saunct for the crown;”—a doctrine at which the elders shake their reverend heads, apprehending the King David to be of Judea, and not of Scotland. But though its graceful spire still rests upon the solid mason-work of the old times, at this period, while Katie stands beside it, the rain drops in through the gray mouldering slates, and the little church is falling into decay.

Further on, over that great field of green corn, which the wind sweeps up and down in long rustling waves, you see ruined Newark projecting too upon the Firth; while down here, falling between two braes, like the proverbial sifter between two stools, lies the village.

A burn runs down between the braes, and somewhere, though you scarcely can see how, finds its way through those strangely scattered houses, and through the *chevaux-de-frise* of black rocks, into the sea. But at this present time, over these black rocks, the foaming waves dash high and wild, throwing the spray into the faces of lounging fishers at the cottage doors, and anon recede with a low growling rush, like some enraged lion stepping backward for the better spring. Out on the broad Firth the waves plunge and leap, each like a separate force;—but it is not the mad waves these fishers gaze at, as they bend over the encircling rocks, and eagerly, with evident excitement, look forth upon the sea; neither is it the storm alone which tempts Katie Stewart down from the high-road to the village-street, to join one of the groups gathered there, and while she shades her eyes with her hand—for now a strange yellow sunbeam flickers over the raging water—fixes her anxious gaze on one spot in the middle of the Firth, and makes her

forget for the moment that she has this hope or fear which does not concern her under speck upon the wave.

What is it? A far-off pinnacle, its painted side heeling over into the sea, which yawns about it, till you feel it is gulfed at last, and its struggle over is not so; yonder it rises again, shooting into the air, as you can think, through spray and foam which surround it in mist, till again the great wave has the little mast which they have not been able to displace, as it sinks lower and lower, till it strikes the water like a floating spar, and you almost see the upturned keel. The fishing-boats out at the mouth of the Firth and many hearts among these women quail and sink as they see the storm; but along the whole of the water there is not one vessel but it is nothing less than madness to the wrestle of the elements in such a storm as this. It engrosses all thought.

“She canna win in—she’s by the now, and reach this she never binna by a miracle. Lord save her, der she’s gane!”

“Na, she’s righted again,” said a young fisherman, “and they’ve got that unchancy mast. They’ve got stout hearts and skeely hands to hold her; but it’s for life, and that’s baith pith and lear. There’s owre now.”

“There’s a providence on the cried a woman: “twenty times the pented side turn owre like the of the net. If they’ve won there Largo Bay to yonder, they’ll win; and the Lord send I kent our boat safe in St. Andrews Bay.”

“Oh, cummers! thinkna o’ said an old woman in a widow’s “wha kens whose son or whose to be in that boat; and they have to strive for themselves, and to see in;—but my Jamie sank in the name to take pity on him, or so o’ supplication. Oh! thinkna o’ think o’ them yonder that’s lost their life, and help them wi’ afore Him that has the sea and the thereof in the hollow of His hand. Lord have pity on them! and be desolate suner than the blessed.”

“Wha will they be—where a pinnacle come from—and do there’s hope?” asked Katie Stewart.

"It was naething less than madness to venture into the Firth in such a wind—if they were out afore the gale came on," said a fisherman; "and as for hope, I would say there was nae, if I was out yonder myself, and I've thought hope was owre times this half-hour—but yonder's the glinting on a wet oar, though she's nae still on the side of yon muckle wave. I wadna undertake to say what a bauld art and guid luck, and the help of Providence, winna come through."

And a bold heart and the help of Providence surely are there: for still—sometimes buried under the overlying mass of water which leaps and foams above her, it sometimes bounding on the buoyant untain-head of some great wave, which seems to fling its encumbrance from it like a spray—the resolute boat makes visible progress; and at last the exclamations sink here grows a yearning tenderness in the hearts of the lookers on, to those who, in this long protracted struggle, are fighting and to hand with death;—and now, as

the little vessel rises and steadies for a moment, some one utters an involuntary exclaiming; and as again it falls, and the yellow sunbeam throws a sinister glimmer on its wet side, a low cry comes unconsciously from some heart—for the desperate gear brings out here, as always, the universal human kindred and brotherhood.

It is a strange scene. That cool young fisherman there has not long returned from fishing-ground, and at his open door the lines, heavy with sea-weed and gleaming, which he has just been clearing, are making ready for to-morrow's use. With his wide petticoat trowsers, and at sea-boots still on, he leans against a rock, over which sometimes there is a wreath of spray, dashnig about handsome weather-beaten face; while, with that great clasp-knife which he opens and closes perpetually, you see he has cut his hard hand in his excitement and agitation, and does not feel it, though the blood is oozing. His young wife sitting within the open door, as he did on the stone which has been baiting, while her husband "dredged" the lines; but she, too, stands there with not a thought but of the brave man struggling among yonder unchainings. And there stands the widow with her clasped hands, covering her eyes so as she can resist the fascination which attracts all observation to that boat; while the fishermen edge the group, and a circle

of anxious wives, unable to forget, even in the fate of this one, that "our boats" are at the mouth of the Firth, and that it is only a peradventure that they are sheltered in the Bay, cluster together with unconscious cries of sympathy.

And Katie Stewart stands among them, fascinated—unable to go on her way, and think that this concerns her not—with her eyes fixed on the laboring boat, her heart rising and falling as it sinks and rises, yet more with excitement than fear; for a strange confidence comes upon her as she marks how every strain, though it brings the strugglers within a hair's-breadth of destruction, brings them yet nearer the shore. For they do visibly near it; and now the widow prays aloud and turns away, and the young fisherman clenches his hands, and has all his brown fingers marked with blood from the cut which he can neither feel nor see; but near they come, and nearer—through a hundred deaths.

"They'll be on the rocks—they'll perish within reach of our very hands!" cried Jamie Hugh, throwing down the knife and snatching up a coil of rope from a boat which lay near. The group of anxious watchers opened—the young wife laid a faint detaining grasp upon his arm—

"Jamie, mind yourself—for pity's sake dinna flee into danger this way!"

"Let me be—it is for pity's sake, Mary," said the young man; and in a moment he had threaded the narrow street, and, not alone, had hurried to the rescue.

An anxious half-hour passed, and then a shout from the black rocks yonder, under the church-yard, told that at last the imperiled men were saved—saved desperately, at the risk of more lives than their own; for there, impaled on the jagged edge of the rocks, lay the pretty pinnace which had passed through such a storm.

And, with some reluctance, Katie Stewart turned and went upon her way. Strong natural curiosity, and the interest with which their peril had invested them, prompted her to linger and see who these desperate men were; but remembering that they could be nothing to her, and that the day was passing, and her mother expecting her, she turned her pale face to the wind, and went on.

She had gone far, and, still sometimes looking out mournfully upon the troubled Firth, had nearly reached the first straggling houses of Pittenweem, when steps

behind her awakened some languid attention in her mind. She looked back—not with any positive interest, but with that sick apprehension of possibilities which anxious people have. Two men were following her on the road—one a blue jacketed sailor, whose wooden leg resounded on the beaten path, lagging far behind the other; but she did not observe the other—for this man's lost limb reminded her of Willie's letter. If Willie should be thus!

"Katie!—Katie Stewart!"

Was it he, then?—was this maimed man he? Katie grasped her side with both hands instinctively to restrain the sick throbs of her heart.

"Katie, it's me!"—

Not the disabled man—the other, with his whole manly strength as perfect as when he left home—with a bronzed face which she scarcely could recognize at first, a strong matured frame, an air of authority. Katie stood still, trembling, wondering; for Willie, the merchant captain, had no such presence as this naval officer. Could it be he?

"It's me, Katie—God be thanked—I've gotten ye again!"

But Katie could not speak;—she could only gasp, under her breadth—"Was't you—was't you?"

"It was me that was in the boat. What think ye I cared for the storm—me that had so much to hasten home for?—and there was little wind when we started. Well, dinna blame me the first minute; but do ye think I could have staid away another hour?"

Poor Katie! she looked up into his face, and in a moment a host of apprehensions overpowered her. He had left her fresh and young—he found her, now out of her first youth, a sobered woman. The tears came into Katie's eyes—she shrank from him shily, and trembled; for Willie Morison now, in the excitement of his joy, and in his fine naval dress and gold-banded cap, looked a grander gentleman than even Sir Alexander.

"Katie!—do ye no mind me, then? It's me, I tell ye, me—and will ye give me no welcome?"

"I scarcely ken ye, Willie," faltered Katie, looking at him wistfully; "for ye're no like what ye were when ye gaed away; and are ye—are ye?"

But Katie can not ask if he is unchanged; so she turned her head away

from him, and cried, not knowing whether it was a great joy or a great grief which had befallen her.

By-and-by, however, Willie finds comfort for her, and assurance; and the sea gradually dry up of themselves, and give her no further trouble; and then very proudly she takes his arm, and they proceed; very proudly—for the wooden-legged sailor has made up to them, they lingered so long where they met—and passes, holding his cap to his officer.

"We came in a Leith brig," said Willie, "and they gave us the pinnace to go ashore in, for I could not wait my day. So, now, we're hame; and I didna think ye were so bonnie!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"You see Jamie Hugh and even the school together, mother," said the turned wanderer. "How he might be I can not tell, but when he saw me on my cap, he asked if it was me. I said—Ay, it was me; and he was half between a laugh and a grief. He had been watching me beside his door, the street of St. Monance—so I know time after that, ye may believe; but she, with her clever feet, was near Pittenwee before Davie and me made up to her. I saw this white sail on the road. Willie, not very far removed himself from the mood of Jamie Hugh, as he put between his great fingers the corner of his muslin neckerchief which the wind loosened from Katie's throat—"and it was of us gave chase, like these two old Frenchmen after our bonnie wee sister; but I caught ye, Katie—which was more than fell to the lot of Johnnie O'Grady."

"And, Willie, ye're hame again to his mother, grasping his stout arm with her feeble, trembling hands. "Come, mair, and let me look at ye, my bonnie man. Eh, Willie, laddie, there be thankit! for I never thoct to see ye day!"

The sailor turned away his head to conceal his emotion, but his tears fell on his mother's hands.

"We've had a weary time—thou lassie and me," continued the old woman, "and I think I bid to have deeded Willie, if it hadna been for the sea yearning to see ye in the flesh and

and a' your wounds; my puir laddie—are ye weel—are ye a' healed noo?"

"I'm as stout as I ever was," said Willie, blithely—"I've cheated all the doctors, and the king to boot; for small discharge they would have given me, if I had been as work-like when I left the Poole."

"And ye're come to bide?" asked the mother again, as if to convince herself by iteration—"Ye're come hame to bide, to marry Katie there, that's waited on you this ten lang year, and to lay my head in the grave?"

"Well, mother, I'm done with the service," answered the sailor—"I'll be away no longer after this than I must be to make my bread; and as for Katie, mother—"

But Katie shook her hand at him menacingly, in her old saucy fashion, and he ended with a laugh—a laugh which brought another tear upon his mother's hand.

"And what am I that this mercy's vouchsafed to me?" said the old woman: "what am I mair than Nanny Brunton, that lost her ae son in the French lugger run down by his ain ship; or betty Horsbrugh that had twa bonnie lads—twa, and no ane—drowned at the mouth of the Firth in the Lammas drave? But the Lord's been merciful aboon describing, to me and mine. Oh, bairns, if ye ever forget it!—if ye dinna take up my sang, and give him thanks when I'm gane to my place, I'll no get rest in the very heavens—'Such pity as a father hath.' But bairns, bairns, I canna mind the words. I'll mind them a' yonder; for there's your faither been safe in the heavenly places this mony a year—and think ye the Lord gave him nae charge of Willie? 'Oh give ye thanks unto the Lord, for his grace faileth never.' And now gang away to your ain cracks, and let me be my lane till I make my thanksgiving."

By the time that Willie Morrison arrived at his mother's door, his sailor companion, growing less steady of pace as he approached his journey's end, was making his way down the quiet street of West Anster, toward the shore. The wind had somewhat abated, but still the few fisher-boats which lay at the little pier rocked upon the water like shells. A row of cottages looked out upon the harbor—small low houses, a but and a ben; for West Anster shore was a remote, inaccessible,

semi-barbarous place, when compared with the metropolitan claims of its sister street in the eastern burgh. The sailor drew his cap over his brow, and was about to advance to one of these houses, distinguished by a wooden porch over the door, when he discovered some one seated on the stone seat by its side. The discovery arrested him. He stood still, watching her with singular agitation, shuffling his one foot on the causeway, winking his heavy eyelashes repeatedly, and pressing his hand on his breast as though to restrain the climbing sorrow which he could not subdue.

She is a young woman, some twenty years old, with a stout handsome figure and comely face. A woolen petticoat of a bright tint—not red, for that is a dear, aristocratic color—contrasts prettily with the short gown of blue-striped linen secured round her neat waist by that clean check apron. The collar of her shortgown, lined with white, is turned over round her neck, and the white lining of the sleeves is likewise turned up just below the elbow, to give freedom to her active arms. Very nimble are her hands as they twist about the twine and thick bone needle with which they labor: for this is a net which Peggie Steele is working, and she sings while she works, keeping time with her foot, and even sometimes making a flourish with her needle as she hooks it out and in, in harmony with the music. It is a kind of "fancy" work, uncouth though the fabric is—and a graceful work too, though delicate hands would not agree with it; but Peggie Steele's hands have labored for daily bread since she was a child, and the rough hemp is not disagreeable to her.

The fire is shining through the clear panes of the window behind her, and close by the door stands a wheel, on which some one has been spinning hemp; but just now the seat is vacant.

Blithely Peggie's song, unbroken by the wind—for the sea-wall striking out from the side of the cottage shelters her—rings along the silent shore; and the pretty brown hair on Peggie's cheek blows about a little, and the cheek itself glows with additional color—while the strange sailor, slowly advancing, winks again and again his heavy gray eyelids, and brushes his rough hand across his weatherbeaten face.

"Could ye tell me where ane David Steele lives, my woman? it used to be

just by here," said the stranger at last, as Peggie's eye fell upon him.

"Eh, that's my faither!" said Peggie, starting; "he's been pressed and away in a man-o'-war since ever I mind; but if ye kent my faither we'll a' be blithe to see you. Will you no come in to the fire? my mother's out, but she'll be back i' the noo."

"I'll wait here a while—I'm in nae hurry. Gang on wi' your wark, my woman—I'll wait till your mother comes. And what's your name, lassie, and which of the bairns are ye?"

"I'm Peggie," said the young woman, with a blithe, good-humored smile—"I'm the auldest; and then there's Davie, that's bund to William Wood the joiner in the Elie—he's a muckle laddie; and Tam and Rob are at the schule."

"Ye'll no mind your faither?" said the stranger, shuffling about his one foot, and again rubbing his sleeve over his face.

"But I do that! I mind him as weel as if I had seen him yesterday. The folk say I'm like him," said Peggie, with a slight blush and laugh, testifying that "the folk" said that bonnie David Steele's daughter had inherited his good looks; "and I mind that weary day the Traveler was stoppit in the Firth—and my mother threeps she saw my faither ta'en out into the boat; but wassa it a mercy when it was to be, and only ae lassie in the family, that I was the auldest?"

"Ye'll have been muckle help and comfort to your mother," said the sailor, still winking his heavy eyelashes, and fixing his eyes on the ground.

"Ye ken a lassie can turn her hand to mony a thing," said Peggie, as the net grew under her quick fingers. "There's thae muckle laddies maun have schuling, and can do little for themselves, let alane ither folk; and I had got my schuling owre, for the mair mercy, for I was ten when my faither was pressed."

The man groaned and clenched his hands involuntarily.

"You're surely no weel," exclaimed the kindly Peggie. "Gang in by, and sit down by the fire, and I'll rin round to Sandy Mailin's for my mother. She's gane for some hemp she was needing. I'll be back this minute."

And with a foot as light as her heart, and meeting the gust of wind at the corner, which tossed her hair about her cheeks, and made her apron stream behind

her like a flag—with a burst of merry laughter, Peggie ran to bring her mother.

Left in charge of the cottage, the man went in, and drew a wooden stool to the fire. A kettle of potatoes hung on the crook over the little grate, just beginning to bubble and boil. On the deal table at the window stood an earthenware vessel with a very little water at the bottom of it, filled with balls of twine; for the hemp which Peggie Rodger first spun afterward twisted into twine, of which the younger Peggie worked her net. A wooden bed, shut in by a panel door, at the whole end of the apartment—and so homely was the furniture of the room, for the sailor looked round upon it with regular curiosity, continually applying a colored handkerchief to his cheeks for pity—honest, struggling, honorable, fearing poverty—(for there lay the Bible on a shelf within reach, under a cover preserving its boards, every day in daily use)—was written on every part of these homely interior arrangements. The stranger looked round them "with a heart at his mouth," as he said afterward, but now he has to seat himself, and make a great effort to command his feelings as steps are rapidly approaching.

"A man wi' a tree leg?—did ye ever see him before, Peggie?—and what did he want wi' me?" said Peggie Rodger.

"He didna say he wanted you, man—he asked for Dauvid Steele; and I said a' the time as if he could have got at every word I said."

"Gude keep us! wha can he be?" said the mother.

She paused on the threshold to look at him. He had taken off his cap, and was turning such an agitated face toward her that Peggie Rodger was half afraid.

"Ye dinna ken me, then?" exclaimed the stranger, pressing his handkerchief to his face, and bursting into a paroxysm of tears—"ye dinna ken me, Peggie Rodger!"

"Eh, preserve me! Davie Steele's man! I div ken ye, Gude be thane! Eh, Davie, Davie—man, is this you?"

And the hard hands clasped each other as none but hard, toilworn hands can grasp, and the husband and wife, with overbrimming eyes, looked into each other's face while Peggie, reverent and silent, stood looking on behind.

"Gude forgie me, I'm greeting," said Peggie Rodger, as her tears fell upon

their hands—"and what have I to do with tears this day? Eh, Davie, man, it's been a dreary ten year; but it's owre now, the Lord be thankit. Davie! Davie man! is't you?"

"Ye may ask that, Peggie," said her husband mournfully, looking down upon his wooden leg.

"Puir man! puir man! but were they guid to ye, Davie? And ye didna tell me about it in your letter: but it maybe was best no, for I would have broken my heart. But, Davie, I'm keeping ye a' to mysel, and look at wee Peggie there, waiting for a word frae her faither."

"And ye said ye minded me, lassie," said Davie Steele, as Peggie came forward to secure his hand. "Weel, ye minded me anither-like man. And ye've been a guid bairn to your mother—blessings on ye for't; but ye were a wee whiteheaded thing the last time I saw ye, and kent about naething but play. Peggie, how in a' the world has this bairn warstled up into the woman she is?"

"Weel, Davie, my man, I'll no say it hasna been a fecht," said the mother, sitting down close by him on another stool, and wiping the tears from her cheek, "for there's the laddies' schulin—and they're muckle growing laddies, blessings on them! but I would have broken doun lang ago, baith body and spirit, if it hadna been for that bairn. However ill things were, Peggie aye saw a mercy when ilka ane was whingeing about her."

"And am I no the truest prophet?" said Peggie, with a radiant face. "Faither, ye may ca' me a witch when ye like, for I aye said ye would come hame."

"Blessings on ye baith! blessings on ye a'," said the sailor, brushing away his tears; "it's worth a lang trial to have such a hamecoming."

"And the 'taties is boiling," said Peggie Steele. "I'll rin east the toun when they're poured, mother, to John Lamb's, and get something to kitchen them better than that haddie; and there's the callants hame frae the schule."

CHAPTER XXX.

"WEEL, Isabell, maybe it's right enough—I'll no say; but to be John Stewart's daughter, and only a sailor's wife—for he'll be naething but captain of a brig

noo, though he was master of the Poole—Katie will have mair grandeur than ever I saw in ane like her. Twa silk gowns, no to speak of lace and cambric, and as mony braws as would set up a toun."

Mrs. Stewart was smoothing out affectionately with her hands the rich folds of Katie's wedding-gown. It was true the ruby-colored silk was still undimmed and unspotted—and silk was an expensive fabric in those days; but this one was blue, pale and delicate, and could by no possibility be mistaken for the other. It made a lustre in Katie's little room—its rich skirt displayed on the bed, its under petticoat spread over the chair in the window, and the pretty high-heeled shoes, made of blue silk like the gown, with their sparkling buckles of "Bristo set in silver" illuminating the dark lid of Katie's chest. Mrs. Stewart pinched with pretended derision the lace of the stomacher, the delicate ruffles at the elbows, and shrugged her shoulders over the white silk petticoat. "Weel, weel! I never had but ae silk gown a' my days, and it's nane the waur o' my wearing; but I'm sure I dinna ken what this world is coming to."

"Weel, mother, weel!" said the gentle Leddy Kilbrachmont, "If a silk gown mair to the piece of us was a' it was coming to, it would be nae ill; and Willie's no like a common shipmaster. With a' that lock of prize-money, and his grand character, he'll can do weel for baith himsel and her; and a master in a man-o'-war is no ane to be looked down upon; forbye that the gown is Lady Anne's present, mother, and she has a guid right to bask about that. We were laying our heads thegither, the gudeman and me, to see if ye would consent to have it up-by at Kilbrachmont; for ye ken, mother, our ain minister that christened us a' has the best right to marry us—and it's no that far from Kellie but Lady Anne might come—and there's plenty women about the house to take a' the fash; and if ye were just willing, ye ken—"

"If she's owre grand to be married out of the Milton, she'll ne'er see me at her wedding," said Mrs. Stewart. "What's Katie, I would like to ask ye, Isabell, that there's a' this fash about her? A willful cuttie! with her silk gowns and her laces. *W* do ye think she's ev-

to fend wi' a man's wages? My certy, if she ends in as guid a house as her mother's, she'll hae little to complain o'!"

"Whisht noo, mother, whisht! ye ken it's no that," said Isabell, "but just it would be handy for a' body—the minister and Lady Anne—and no muckle trouble to yoursel; and you're awn us a day in hurst, the gudeman and me—so I think ye canna refuse us, mother."

"Weel, lassie, gae way wi' ye, and fash me nae mair," said the yielding mother; "for I'm sure amang ye I have nae will o' my ain, nae mair than Janet's youngest bairn; and even it can skirl and gloom when it likes, and no ane daurs to pit it down if it werena whiles me. I ance could guide mysel—ay, and mair than mysel—as weel as most folk; but now there's you to fleech me, and Janet to weary me out, and Katie to pit me that I never ken whether I'm wild at her or no. Gae way with ye, I say, and provoke me nae mair, for I'll thole nae mortal interfering wi' my huswifship, and sae I tell ye a'."

This latter part of Mrs. Stewart's speech was delivered as she descended the narrow stair, followed by Isabell; and its concluding words were emphatically pronounced in hearing of the whole family at the kitchen door.

It was evening, and the miller had come in from his work, and sat in his dusty coat, with his chair drawn a little out of its usual corner, snapping his fingers to Janet's child, which, crowing with all its might, and only restrained by the careless grasp which its mother held of its skirts, was struggling with its little mottled bare legs to reach its grandfather. Janet's head was turned away—Janet's tongue vigorously employed in a gossip with Robert Moulter's wife, who stood at the door, and she herself all unaware that her child was sprawling across the hearth, with those little, stout, incapable legs, and that her mother's eye beheld a cinder—an indisputable red-hot cinder—falling within half an inch of the struggling feet of little Johnnie Morison.

"Do ye no see that bairn? Look, ye'll hae the creature's taes aff in my very sight!" exclaimed Mrs. Stewart—while the guilty Janet pulled back the little fellow with a jerk, and held him for a moment suspended by his short skirts before she plunged him down into her

lap. "I needna speak to you, ye little taupie—it's little *you'll* ever do for your bairns; but John Stewart, you that's been a faithier for thretty year and mair—if folk could ever learn!"

The astonished miller had been looking on almost with complacency while the thunderbolt fell on Janet. Now unexpectedly implicated himself, the good man scratched his head, and shrugged his shoulders—for self-defense was an unprofitable science in the Mill; and John never made any greater demonstration than when he sang—"Bell my wife she lo'es nae strife."

The gossip silently disappeared into the doorway, and Katie looked up from where she sat by the window. Katie's face was very bright, and the old shy look of unhappiness had returned to it once more. It was impossible to believe, as she looked at this little figure, and at her curls shining like gold on the neck, that Willie Morison's bride was anything but a girl; and it was as if Katie they all treated her; she was the little Katie still in Kellie Castle—a little self-delusion which made it considerably more easy to suffer the very decided with which Katie influenced the household.

She was marking a quantity of damask napkins and table-cloths on the deal table, among which were done so many repetitions of the "K. S." Katie was troubled with her riches—could almost have wished them all at the bottom of the mill burn.

"Weel, Gude be thankit! you're the last," said Mrs. Stewart: "a dizzier would have been less fash than the lassies of ye. I'm no meaning you, is it?—and ye needna look up into my face, gait, Katie Stewart, as if I was doing an injury; but how is't possible to a woman to keep her patience, and tae wi' a taupie like you!"

"Whisht, mother, whisht," said peace-making Leddy Kilbrachmont.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"AND Katie, Katie, you're going in to leave me, after all."

"It's no my blame, Lady Anne. Sae Katie, her eyes gleaming archly through

their downcast lashes; "and I canna help it now."

"But you might have helped it, Katie Stewart; you might have written him a letter and kept him away, and lived all your life at Kellie with me."

And Lady Anne clasped her arms round Katie's waist, and pressed her forehead against the rich lace of that famous stomacher; for Katie was in her blue silk gown, and this was her bridal day.

"But he would have broken his heart," said Katie, the old habitudes, and more than these, the impossibility of escape or delay impressing her with a momentary wish, a momentary pang—only to be free.

"You never mind *me*, Katie," said Lady Anne: "might *he* not have suffered as well as *me*?"

"And it would have broken mine, too," said Katie drooping her flushed face, and speaking so low that Lady Anne, closely as she clung to her, could scarcely hear.

"Oh, Katie!" Lady Anne unclasped her arms and looked into her favorite's face. Firmly stood the bride with her downcast eyes and burning cheeks—blushing, but not ashamed.

"No, Lady Anne, it's no my blame," repeated Katie Stewart.

"It's no like you, my lady—it's no like you to daunt on the puir bairn, now that there's nae remeid," said Bauby Rodger; "and ye'll e'en see her mony a time, Lady Anne; whereas the puir lad, if he had bidden away—But what's the guid o' a' thae words, and him waiting down in the big room, Miss Katie, and you this morning a bride?"

They were in Leddy Kilbrachmont's chamber of state, where the gentle Isabell, with good taste, had left them alone, and where Bauby had just been giving the finishing touches to Katie's toilet. Mrs. Stewart, down stairs, was entertaining the assembled guests; and Janet, greatly indignant at being shut out from this room, lingered on the stairs, and wandered in and out of the next apartment. But Isabell wisely and delicately kept watch, and the friends who, all her life, had lavished so much love on Katie Stewart, had her for this last hour to themselves.

"Betty sends you this," said Lady Anne, putting a pretty ring upon Katie's finger. "She said you were to wear it to-day for her sake. Oh, Katie, I almost wish we had not liked you so well!"

"Is Katie ready?" whispered Isabell at the door. "Come, like a good bairn, for every body's waiting, and the minister's down the stair."

And Isabell drew her trembling sister's arm within her own, and led her into the next room to exhibit her to an assembled group of waiting maidens.

"My lady, it's no like you," repeated Bauby; "ye'll hae her greeting before the very minister. Puir thing, she'll no have the common lot if she hasna sairer cause for tears before lang, and her gaun away like a lamb to be marriet; but for pity's sake, Lady Anne, let her get owre this day."

"I mind always how dreary we'll be without her, Bauby," sighed Lady Anne, forgetting her usual dignity.

"Weel, ye'll get her back when her man gangs to the sea—ye'll see her as often as you like. For Katie Stewart's sake, Lady Anne—"

Lady Anne drew herself up, wiped her pale cheek, said "You forget your place, Bauby," and was composed and herself again.

And in a very little time it was over. Katie Stewart went forth—like a lamb adorned for the sacrifice, as Bauby said—and was married.

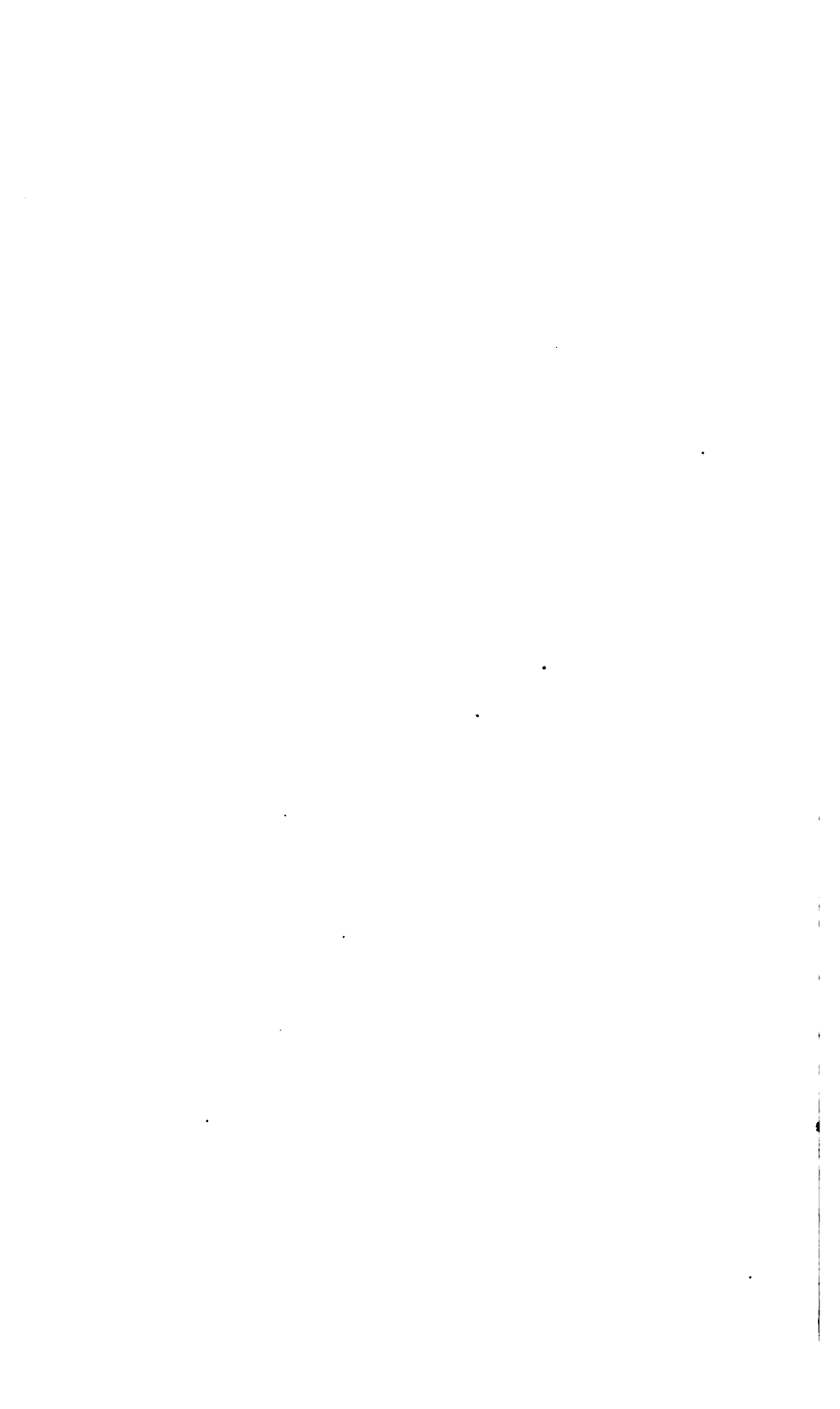
"He's a very decent lad," said Bauby, shaking her head; "and there's guid men as weel as ill men in this world, though it disna aye turn out best that promises fairest. The Lord keep my ain darlin bairn, and make her a guid wife and a content ane; for if ill came to ae gowd hair of her, I could find it in my heart to strike him down at my foot that had clouded my lamb. Weel, weel, he's a decent lad, and likes her—as wha could forbear liking her?—sae I'll keep up my heart."

And Bauby was wise; for Captain William Morison was that splendid exception to her general rule—a good man—and his wife *was* content. A long path it was they had to travel together, full of the usual vicissitudes—the common lot; but, "toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing," the years surprised them on their way, and led them into age. But though the golden hair grew white on Katie Stewart's head, the love which had brightened her youth forsook her never; and Lady Anne Erskine, in the last of her prolonged, calm days, still clung in her heart to her childish choice—which no other tie had ever displaced, no other tenderness made her forget—and

when she could remember little else, remembered this, and left her love behind her, like a jewel of especial value, to the friends who remained when she was gone. For all this crowd of years had not dis-

chanted the eyes, nor chilled the child's heart, which gave its generous admiration long ago to little Katie Stewart, playing with her threaded gowans on the burnside at Kellie Mill.

THE END.



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We speak thus of HARPER'S WEEKLY because we owe it a debt which we can pay in no better way than by speaking sincerely of its merits. The paper has ever been to us a source of valuable information, and putting aside the literary interest of its contents, its illustrations of the war alone have made it an intellectual necessity. We have often had occasion to copy articles upon the present crisis into *The City Item*, and our readers have had an opportunity to admire its high patriotism and worth.

As a Family Paper, it has no superior—as an Illustrated Family Paper, it has no equal. All of its articles are pure and unexceptionable in morality and taste. It has certainly the best story-writers in America among its contributors. Its humorous illustrations are equal to the best thing in *Punch*, and we presume that its pictures of the ridiculous elements of the rebellion have earned it the hearty hatred of every rebel who has intelligence to know when he is really hit.

Take it all in all, whether for information or amusement, HARPER'S WEEKLY deserves every success and all praise. It has a great work to do, and a great people to support. We shall not say that we wish it to be better than it is, for we are almost sure that it could not be changed but for the worse.

FRANKLIN SQUARE, NEW YORK, February 1, 1862.

A New Novel, by the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."

Harper's Magazine.—February, 1862.

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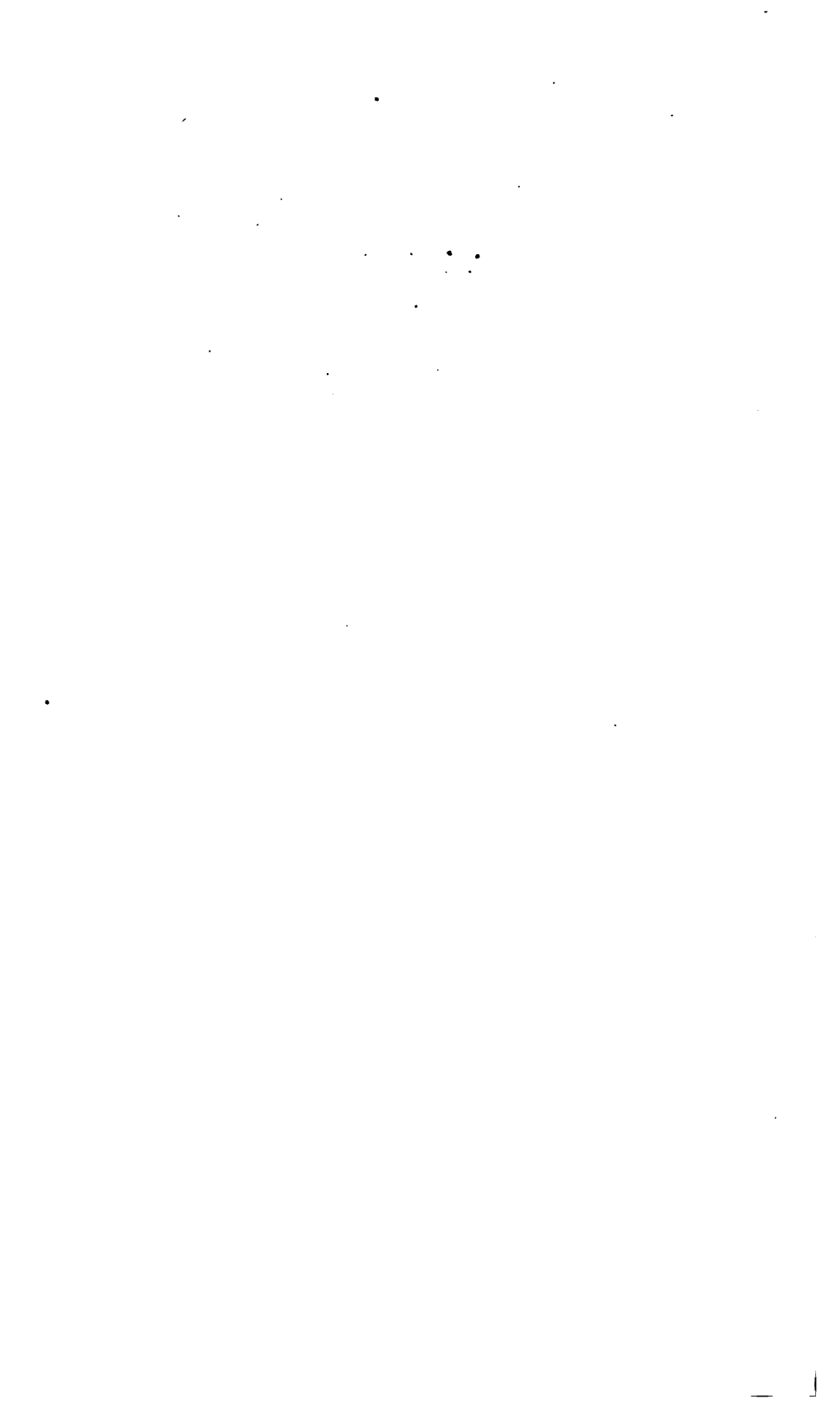
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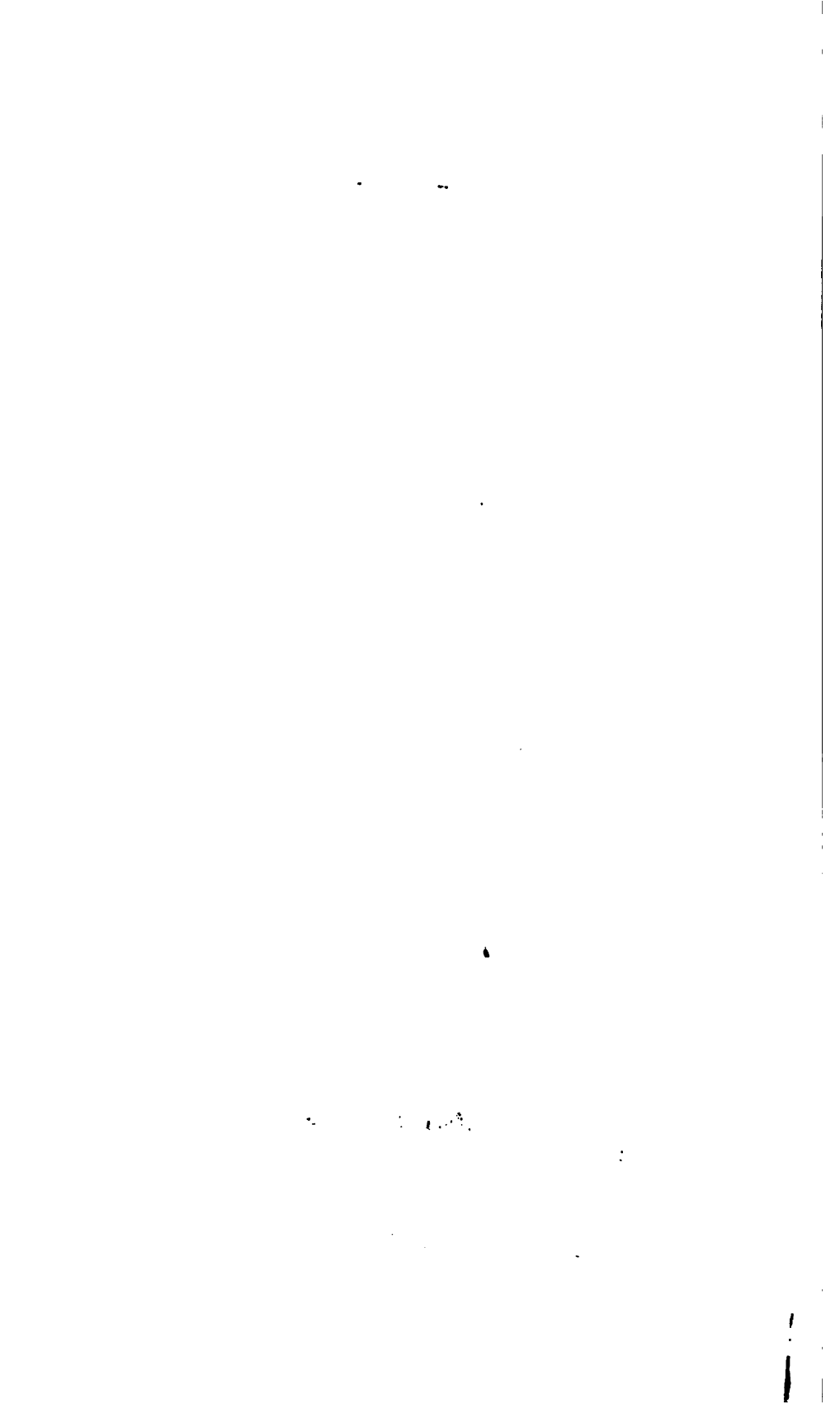
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